

# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc.

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THE JOURNAL OF THE  
CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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### THE FRONT COVER

During the 19th century it was customary to sell booklets containing the words and sometimes the music of songs performed by the featured talking and singing clown. Songsters continued to be used by circuses through the 1920s when they were combined with a listing of the performance.

In 1879 T. B. McIntyre was the star clown of W. W. Cole's New York and New Orleans Circus. The actual songster is 3 3/4 by 6 inches. It is from the Pfening Archives.

### THE BACK COVER

The 1915 Hugo Bros. Modern United Shows was owned by Victor and Charles Hugo. This ten car circus lasted only one year.

The courier is 10 1/2 by 13 3/4 inches and is from the Pfening Archives.

### IRS RULING

The Circus Historical Society, Inc. has been advised by the Internal Revenue Service that recognition has been granted to operate as a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit corporation. All contributions to the Circus Historical Society will be tax deductible as a publicly-supported organization.

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### NEW COMPUTER

This issue of the *Bandwagon* has been produced using an Apple SuperMac 6500/250 computer with QuarkXPress 4.0 page software. Also new are a twenty inch color monitor, an H-P Scanjet 6100c and an Apple color printer.

The new scanner will provide the

halftones and other illustrations. The entire magazine will be composed on the computer and will no longer require pasting of illustrations.

The page layout style has also been redesigned.

### EDWARD L. JONES

Edward L. Jones, of Zanesville, Ohio, died on January 17, 1998 at age 86. Jones served as Secretary-Treasurer of the Circus Historical Society from 1976 to 1985. He joined the CHS in 1958.

### DO NOT SEND DUES IN ADVANCE

Do not send dues and subscription payments to the Secretary-Treasurer until you receive your dues notice. Your membership card will be enclosed with your notice.

### ADVISE ADDRESS CHANGES

After each mailing a number of *Bandwagons* are returned by the post office with a fifty cents postage charge.

Please remember to advise the editor of any change of address at once so you will not miss an issue.

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1966-Jan.-Feb.  
1967-July-Aug., Nov.-Dec.  
1968-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.  
1972-All available.  
1973-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.  
1975-All available.  
1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.  
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.  
1978-All available.  
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1980-1986-All available.  
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.  
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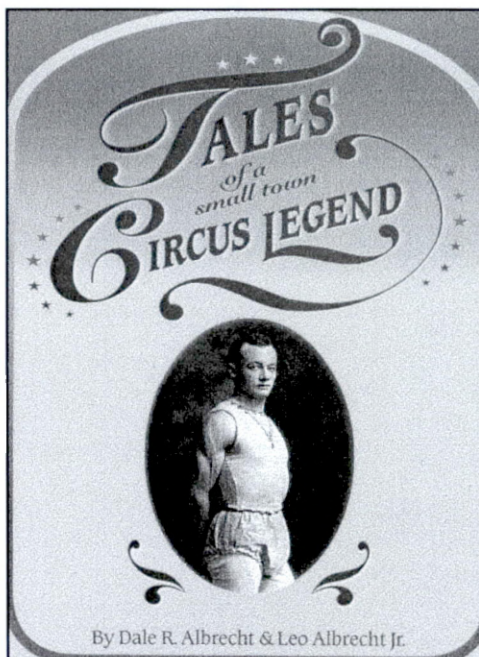
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### 'Tales of a Small Town Circus Legend'

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About the Authors

Dale R. Albrecht and Leo Albrecht Jr. decided to take on what started out to be a family project. Dale is a Senior Chief Petty Officer in the Navy stationed at NAS Brunswick, ME. He wrote most of the book while stationed overseas at NAVSTA Rota, Spain. Leo Jr, who provided most of the technical support is retired and resides in Belle Plaine, MN, his birth home and base for their family circus for years.

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# COVER GIRL: A VIEW FROM THE CENTER RING

By Kitty Clark  
As told to Robert Sabia

## Preface

Shortly after circus fan Jim Hoyer died, his widow Helen put most of his collection in an auction held just outside of Hartford, Connecticut. Howard Tibbals and I jointly bid on the slide and film collection. As many know, Jim and his colleague Bill Day were amongst the first to take color slides of the circus, starting in 1939, just after color slides became generally available. Not surprisingly, the majority of the slides were of Ringling-Barnum under canvas. All subject matter was covered, including the train, set up, wagons, and particularly, the performers. It took more than six months to go through the slides. The identification process continues today.

There were hundreds of slides of show girls. As expected, all were attractive, posing for the camera with their radiant performer's smiles. In this assembled pulchritude, there was one person who stood out, having a persona that literally lit up the screen. That was Kitty Clark. She was clearly very special and as such, intrigued me. A bit of research into White Tops further peaked my interest. The June-July 1944 issue, which discussed the Hartford fire in detail, had the following to say about Kitty: "A trouper. The two young daughters of my editor were seated in Section 'E' boxes when the blaze spread over them. It was 'that tall, blonde girl who rides horses and is on top of the pile of elephants' who came to them in the fire's hell and led the children to safety. Later I saw Kitty—and Kitty alone—actually inside the charred arena with two drinking water buckets. While some girls cried their eyes out in the dress-

ing top or became ill from the ruins' stench, Kitty Clark walked among soldiers, firemen and wreckage probers with drinking dipper." Very special, indeed!

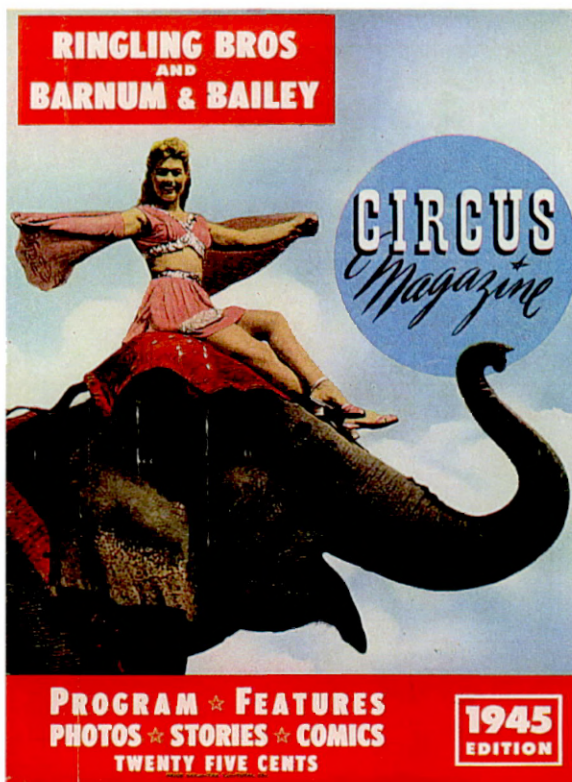
That did it. A person worth knowing more about? Most assuredly. Now what? How to proceed? Following the maxim: "When in doubt, ask someone smart for help," I implemented accordingly. I called Jim Dunwoody, explained my desire to contact Kitty, and solicited his suggestions. He said he would be back to me in a couple of days. He was back with not only her address but her telephone number. She was

Kitty Clark on the cover of the 1945 Ringling-Barnum program. All illustration are from the Pfening Archives.

living on the east coast of Florida.

I wrote. She wrote back. She was delighted that someone would be interested in her after these forty-five or so years since she left circus life. I called. She called back. We visited and became very good friends. I met a person that possessed an inner warmth that matched her external beauty. A marvelously developed sense of humor complemented her zest for life. She was a pleasure to know in all regards. What follows is a portion of her circus story. It is a loss that her premature and unexpected death intervened to prevent it being truly finished. But she lives in the memories of all those who thrilled to her being.

DAMN! As my head was yanked forward with a force that appeared to add inches to my height, my first thought was that this should make the press agent's job so much easier because they frequently claimed that I was six feet tall anyway. All my humor was gone in a flash, because Ruth's gray bulk caused the adhesions in my legs to pop and snap as they were ripped from the bone structure. My senses became blurry as Ruth, realizing something was wrong, quickly responded to head elephant trainer Richard Shipley's prodding and shifted her enormous weight from her front legs to her rear ones. In so doing, Ruth's front left foot introduced itself to my forehead, mercifully ending my consciousness for the next fifteen minutes. By that time, I had been taken from the center ring at Madison Square Garden to one of the electri-





cal rooms under the seats. As the face leaning over me slowly took the shape of my mentor, Robert Ringling, I could finally understand what he was apparently repeating "Kitty, please say something." Blinking, I knew something was definitely wrong. My left false eyelash was gone and I must have looked something like a clown rather than a performer. Then it all started coming back to me. During the elephant number, I wore this busby, the tall, fur hat worn in the British army, which added two feet to my five foot eight inch height. Ruth, the lead elephant and a dear friend, did a rear leg stand with me standing between her legs. Then with me ducking under her huge body, she shifted her weight to her front legs. In so doing, her front legs apparently were closer together than normal, thereby catching the busby between them. Nice trick when it works. Nobody said it would be easy but nobody defined the spec "Changing of the Guard" as death defying either—at least to my knowledge.

Elkhart, Indiana wasn't exactly Sarasota or even Peru, but it was home and a great place to grow up. Dad, an ex-Marine, had returned to Elkhart in 1918 after the war and continued with his family. His ambition was to join a circus but that wasn't to be as his offsprings came in a steady flow starting with my sister in 1916, my brother in 1918<sup>1</sup> and me in 1921. Although Dad's circus involvement was thwarted by his and Mom's amorous activities, his interest in the circus never waned. Throughout my youth, I was regaled with a constant flow of stories about the circus, vividly depicting the excitement and the glamour of that aspect of show life. I guess I was involved in the circus from the time I could understand the essence of his exciting tales of the tanbark. Dad's work as the Fire Chief of Elkhart didn't hurt either because I could see performers in action from the back lot rather than the bleacher seats. They were real people from that perspective; surely glamorous, but very friendly nevertheless. Meanwhile while entering my teen years, I was unknowingly preparing myself for a career in the circus. Summers were spent at my

uncle's farm where I learned to ride a horse bareback with a reasonable degree of skill. Around this time, I seriously injured my leg as a result of an ice skating accident which eventually prevented me from becoming a bareback rider because of torn ligaments which weakened my legs substantially. But ligaments and adhesions were not on the mind of this youngster, only enjoying the farm with its animals and excitement.

Katherine Clark, age 16, ready to join out with a circus in 1937.

At this time, I took an interest in twirling the baton. I became very adapt at this and when I was fourteen, participated in the National Music Festival at Soldiers Field in Chicago. I had the good fortune of winning first place in the national junior championship competition which changed my life in a very decided fashion.<sup>2</sup> On a typically hot and clear summer day in July 1936, Dad and a close friend of his, George Way, took me to the Ringling-Barnum lot at South Bend, Indiana to meet with George's old friend Pat Valdo. Although George was the General Manager of the Conn Musical Instruments Company in Elkhart, he formerly spent a few seasons on the Ringling circus as a member of the band. His memories of his life on the circus were both vivid and positive. We quickly found Mr. Valdo beside the performers' entrance to the big top speaking to a couple of gentlemen. He greeted George warmly and was introduced to my father and me. George advised him about my skills with the baton and the possibility of my finding a spot on the show the following year. Responding to his request, I went through my routine. It apparently was pleasing because he immediately asked Dad my age. Dad added two

years and told him that I was seventeen. Mr. Valdo said he would send me a contract for the 1937 season as a baton twirler and a "generally useful." And that was that, except that I was on cloud nine for the ensuing six months awaiting the contract. I never realized it would be so simple—and it wasn't.

Wait I did, through a glorious fall with the trees turning the traditional reds, yellows and oranges. As the head majorette of the high school, I did my act at all of the home football games. Great fun, but it still wasn't circus according to Dad. Christmas season came and went and the daily search of the mail was to no avail.

As January turned into February 1937, rumblings were coming out of Peru that the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus might be coming back on the road after taking a hiatus during 1936. The February 6th edition of the *Billboard* emblazoned the news that, indeed, the Hagenbeck show was back as the second largest. Dad and George didn't require any further incentive. As soon as we found out that Ralph Clawson was the Peru manager getting the show ready for the road, we were on our way motoring down to Peru. Upon our arrival, we were directed by Ollie Miller, the elephant man, to Mr. Clawson's office. After renewing acquaintances with George and Dad, Clawson asked me to perform my routine. I did and he hired me on the spot. Not only was Clawson a nice person, but he was a decision maker, at least in my situation. He promised a contract in the mail in a few short days and so it was. At my tender age, I was totally oblivious to the huge task placed upon the broad shoulders of Mr. Clawson. Framing a thirty-five car railer in two short months was a monumental effort notwithstanding the show was on the road





Kitty's friend Alicia Villa on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1937.

just two years earlier. I saw or heard none of this extraordinary effort as I returned to Elkhart later that day.

My focus was on being prepared for the Chicago Coliseum opening on April 7th and the dress rehearsal the day previous. My mother was busy designing and sewing my costume for the performance. The week after visiting Peru, I received the long awaited Ringling contract but it was too late. My commitment was to Mr. Clawson and nearby Chicago.

Just prior to the opening, Dad, Mother and I drove to Chicago. My mother and I took a room at a local boarding house. She stayed with me throughout the entire Chicago engagement making sure that my transition to show business was as easy as possible. Looking back, I have no doubts that she was prepared to take me back to Elkhart should the circumstances prove to be unacceptable for any reason. But as events transpired, that was not the case. The circus rapidly became my first love.

Our opening in Chicago was a thrill of a lifetime for a sixteen year old from a small town. The blare of the trumpets heralded the beginning of the performance and the season. To me, those sounds were much more than that. Spinning my baton, I stepped off into a life of excitement, adventure and glamour; far beyond my wildest expectations. Amazingly enough, I found myself leading the opening tournament entitled "Pharaoh's Caravan." Around the hippodrome track I went, marching and twirling to the up-tempo music of Henry Kyes and his seventeen piece band. Certainly heady stuff. But there was more to come, for after my stint I was besieged by several reporters from the Chicago press corps who interviewed me (as if I had anything significant to say) and took several pic-



tures. The next day, there I was in a Chicago newspaper with a short article about a local girl making good. I sure was beginning to like show business. The Chicago stand continued with me getting to know many of the performers. All were very kind and protective of me and took great pains to show me the ropes of circus life. Toward the end of the Chicago run, Alicia Villa joined the circus and became my mentor. She was supposedly Poncho Villa's daughter and she was a big attraction with all of the press hype regarding General Pershing's chasing Poncho all over Mexico without ever catching him twenty years before. Alicia became a dear friend.

A few days prior to the commencing of the road adventure, several ladies on the show took me to the train which was parked on a siding in a large freight yard. We went into the virgins' car and I was shown my home for the months to come. Large it wasn't. Austere it was. It was approximately 3 1/2 feet high by 3 1/2 feet wide by 6 feet long. At one end was a wooden, lockable case that could be used for all the incidentals necessary for a woman's survival. The circus furnished a mattress, pillow, sheets and pillow case. It also provided a wooden footlocker which fit under the lower berth. It was an unwritten rule that when the curtain was drawn in the front of the berth, the occupant wasn't to be disturbed. Generally this rule was observed throughout my show life. My colleagues were quick to advise me that this new home of mine could be decorated in any fashion I would choose. They suggested that I use chintz because of its lively colors and its ruggedness. It wasn't long before we all added a touch of hominess to the car. Given the varied taste of the girls, it probably looked more like a Gypsy's wagon than a circus sleeper

but it was certainly identifiable as home on the road.

Perhaps I should have noticed it, but I didn't. While in Chicago, the weather was gloomy with rain, a frequent companion. It wasn't long after we hit the road, I had good reasons to pay attention to Old Sol. On April 26th, we concluded our Chicago stand. It was down to the train and good bye hugs and kisses to Mom. As I closed the curtains to my berth, there were more than a couple of tears of loneliness and apprehension. What with the strange noises of starting and stopping the train as it left the marshaling yards and the swaying of the car as we transversed upper Indiana heading for our first stand at Marion, I spent a restless night. I was getting to sleep when the train crew was awakening in preparation for unloading my section coming in from Chicago. When I finally got to the lot, the circus was all up and ready. It never ceased to amaze me how white the canvas city was on day one and how short it remained that way. It started raining in Marion on April 26th and it seemed that it never stopped until we returned to Peru in November. Clearly this wasn't the case, but the spring of 1937 was remembered as being one of the wettest on record. Maybe circus life wasn't so great.

Rain and mud notwithstanding, I felt that the circus was made for the likes of me. Being a tomboy, there wasn't a single act that I wasn't interested in trying and over the years I gave most of them a shot, some successfully, and others without success. Perhaps because of my youth, I was permitted to try a variety of acts, as an actual participant on some, as a filler on others. Of course, elephants were a natural for me and horses were another favorite. It was through my prior riding experience at my uncle's farm that I experienced my greatest thrill of my first year of circus life.

It is well known that the first few months of the return to the road of the Hagenbeck circus was filled with turbulence. After organizing the show, Frank Hatch and Edward Arlington sold their interests in the show to Howard Y. Bary, a well known circus press agent and promoter. Bary immediately commenced his reign by making a series of changes to the manage-



ment structure and the actual performance. Poodles Hanneford and his family came on as the principle riding act. Shortly thereafter, Poodles replaced Orrin Davenport as equestrian director in a move that was less than delicate. Other staffers were replaced by individuals favored by Bary. Meanwhile there were strong rumors that a very special headliner would be joining the show shortly. Bary did all he could in stimulating the guessing game by placing ads in the *Billboard* referring to the surprise of the century. When it was finally announced in June, the headliner act could not have pleased me more for it was none other than my favorite cowboy, Hoot Gibson. Unless one grew up in the 1930's, it is difficult to imagine how popular cowboy stars were with both boys and girls of that period.

Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, Tim McCoy and Buck Jones were simply great but my personal favorite was Hoot Gibson. I lived and died at his weekly serials at the local movie house. To see him in the flesh was practically more than this sixteen year old could take. As events turned out, to be befriended by him and participate in his act was literally heaven on earth. Because Hoot joined the show late, his concert was not fleshed out with personnel. When he learned that I could ride with a modest degree of skill, he set out to include me in his act. One of his cowboys, Ted Merchant, taught me how to trick ride. I participated in many of his rope tricks including roping me and my horse while riding by him at a full gallop. This never failed to get a rousing cheer from the many young fans of Hoot's populating the audience. Ted also taught me to stand on my head in the saddle while speeding around the hipodrome track and jump from one side of the saddle to other in full motion. I was encouraged to undertake any trick I felt comfortable with which included practically everything I could think of. With the careful tutoring of Ted, I quickly



Kitty with her movie cowboy friend Hoot Gibson.

became a contributing member of the Great Hoot Gibson's Calvacade of the Old West—all at the age of 16 which wasn't so very old at that!

Hoot was as pleasant a gentleman in real life as he appeared to be on the white screen. Generous to a fault, it merely took a mention by a stranger or friend of the appreciation of a particular garment that Hoot was wearing at that time and he would remove it and give it to the person. On one occasion, a colleague

Kitty in the back yard after making spec in 1937.



complimented Hoot on his marvelous boots and Hoot responded by removing the boots and insisting that the man (now embarrassed) take them. This generosity caused Hoot to be relatively poor in his later life in spite of the fortune that he made throughout his long heyday. When we reached my hometown of Elkhart on June 28th, the local press decided to play up the "local girl makes good" theme. The circus press agent arranged for a screen test with cameras, lights and a short script. The "stars" of this vignette were Hoot and the kid (me). We had a late show because of the horrendous weather and muddy lot. However, the sun was shining on me that day because I was the envy of all of my high school chums. I

was Hoot Gibson's partner in the films. The fact that the movie camera probably never contained any film didn't bother me one iota. I was a movie star for a day and that was enough for me.<sup>3</sup>

As the summer rolled into early fall, the show traveled the Midwest and near South. There were good houses and those that didn't deserve mentioning. I was being transformed from a fledgling into a gritty performer without even being aware of the transition. I was having too much fun and receiving an education besides. Never an early riser, I would get to the lot via Willis Lawson's jitney, an oversize station wagon that was used to transport performers to the lot for a small price. If the stand was one of the too infrequent multiple day dates, the girls would invade a hotel by renting a single room and then at discrete moments, file in the room, one at a time. There, we would luxuriate, taking hot baths and enjoying the good life. These treasured extended stays were very important to us vagabonds who were otherwise on the move at all times.

On August 29th, we



played Evansville. Former Indiana Lieutenant Governor Harold Van Orman gave a luncheon at his McCurdy Hotel for the stars of the show, Alicia Villa and Hoot Gibson. Both insisted that I go along as their guest. Van Orman was married at the time to Harriet Hodgini, a famous bareback rider of that period. I was very impressed by Mr. Van Orman's remarks at the luncheon and especially his ability to speak in public. I had no realization that in a little over ten years time, I would be married to him. Circus life certainly had its unpredictable turns.

Throughout the outdoor season, I developed a habit that didn't particularly endear me to my mother. Loving animals as I did, I was constantly running into stray dogs on the lot that clearly needed a good home and loving care. While it was impossible to properly care for all these dogs on the road, I figured that my mother could care for them until I got home in November. So I sent these strays back to Elkhart via Railway Express. For some reason which was never evident to me, my mother didn't share my enthusiasm about our home becoming a national dog pound. Upon my return in the late fall, there wasn't a single stray dog to welcome me home. She said they all ran away and who's to say that they didn't. Maybe that's how they became strays to begin with.

With the show closing at Austin, Texas in early November, I returned with the train to Peru. Mom and Dad picked me up at the station. I was no longer a First-of-May, but a very young but somewhat seasoned performer. The Chamber of Commerce and the American Legion had me at their functions as a speaker on circus life. I told them I eagerly anticipated my next great adventure, that being on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey during 1938. During the season, Pat Valdo visited to Hagenbeck-Wallace lot and signed me up to play on the Big One. As things evolved, the next season turned out to be more adventuresome than I could possibly imagine.

#### 1938

The Big One! To be on it was a recognizable achievement not unlike



On the big show for the first time in 1938.

playing at the Palace Theater in vaudeville. As I was journeying to Sarasota during the cold residuals of winter in early 1938, I had ample time to reflect upon my first circus season with the Hagenbeck circus, and how it may be different on my prospective tour with Ringling Bros. As contrasted with the tumult existing on Hagenbeck-Wallace, particularly during the first half of the tour, I confident that being on Ringling portended a year of stability, for which Ringling was justifiably noted. Sure, Ringling had a new president, John Ringling North, but he was part of the family and it was said that he had a fair amount of hands-on circus experience. Equally sure, there was a renewed emphasis on the sensational (Gargantua and Frank Buck) but isn't that what circus was all about. Clearly, all was going to be normal and predictable in my budding circus career. Even I knew that 1937 was a good year for the circus in general and the Ringling show in particular. The 1938 season promised to be as good,

at least that was what some circus wags were predicting. Rumors abounded about all the new shows taking the road, with much discussion about the all new (for real) Tim McCoy's Wild West Show. There were many circus owners and investors committing large amounts of money as confirmation in the belief that 1938 would be a humdinger. In a sense it was, but not the way many anticipated.

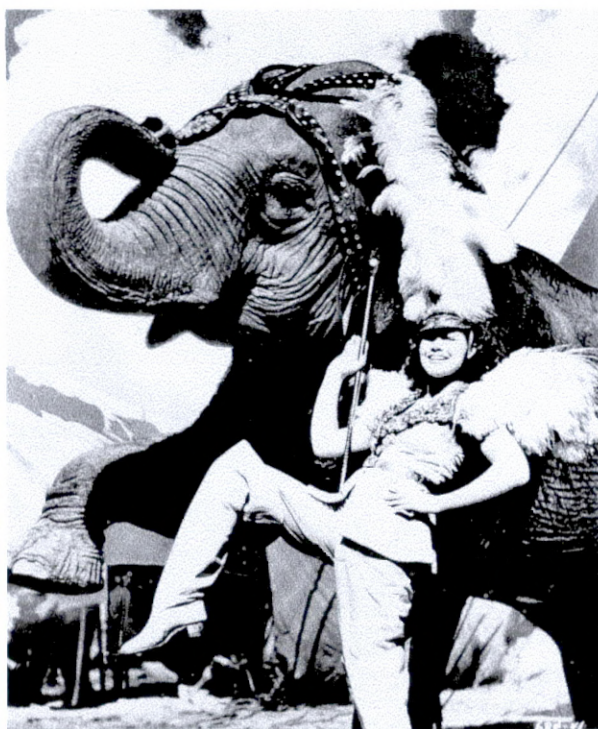
Life started off normally enough. Upon reaching sunny Sarasota, I rented a room in one of the boarding houses that catered to the show folks during the winter. There were a number of "generally useful" gals also in the boarding house. So far, so good. After reporting to Pat Valdo, I immediately started rehearsals. Ed Rooney, the aerial instructor, was trying out girls for a series of trapeze acts. He picked me for a five girl trap act called the human chain. I worked the middle. We all wore broad leather belts around our waists. As a finale to our routine, I hung down from my middle position; the first girl wrapped her legs around my waist the second girl did likewise, wrapping her legs around the first girl's waist; the third girl did the same around the second girl's waist; and the fourth girl did a "birds nest" above me. I probably stretched at least a foot during this part of the act, at least it seemed so, but miraculously returned to my normal height by the time I reached the ground. So went my potential career as the incredible rubber woman.

Although I was new to Sarasota and had but one year in the business, I sensed that there was an unusual level of excitement regarding the onrushing season. Quarters was buzzing with rumors about the changes John Ringling North would make to the circus. There was considerable talk about modernization the show (whatever that meant), making significant changes to the staff, and great changes to the performance. Then, of course, there was the incredible amount of hype focused on Gargantua. Roland Butler and his minions were leaving no stone unturned in capturing the imagination of the circus-going public regarding this monster of the African jun-



gles that was about to invade these United States. As Roland Butler presented his subject, King Kong paled in comparison. "The Terror Is Coming," and a circus legend was born.

The rehearsal period quickly passed with one day melding into the next. It seemed that in almost a flash, we were boarding the single section train of approximately forty cars en-route to New York City. The trip north was long but uneventful, with periodic stops for train crew changes and animal feedings. When we got to the Mott Haven yards in the south Bronx, my girlfriends and I hailed a cab for the trip downtown. As this was my first trip to New York, I was more than a little awed by the skyscrapers which dwarfed anything I had ever seen in Chicago, let alone Elkhart. People swarmed about on the sidewalks and streets. Taxis were everywhere except the times when you were looking for one. In this cacophony, I was to find a home for the next four weeks. Once again, taking a cue from my more experienced colleagues, my new home was to be the Hotel Belvedere, on 48th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues.<sup>4</sup> The Garden was just a step away which was so important during a cold spring. This tanned colored brick facade, ten or so storied building would have been the tallest building by far in Elkhart, but in New York it was almost inconspicuously nestled amongst apartment buildings of equal stature. Almost immediately, we were called at the hotel to get fitted for the costumes by Brooks at 41st Street. Although initial measurements for the costumes were taken in Sarasota, the actual fitting took place just before the dress rehearsal at the Garden. The Brooks team adjusted the various costumes in real time, cutting seams and resewing them, relocating buttons, adjusting collars, all with the final result of every one appearing as if they had tailored garments developed over an extended period time instead of a few minutes. My particular feature



A Ringling-Barnum publicity photo taken in 1940.

costume for the spec "Nepal" consisted of black boots up to my thighs, a turban with a tall feather, a satin bejeweled top and pants to match. It looked great or so I was

A 1943 lithograph using the above photo of Kitty.

## RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS



being told, but unfortunately I couldn't twirl in it. Too restrictive on my movements said I. No problem said they and the designers and seamstresses, armed with scissors, needles and treads, attacked me. Within a few minutes, they had added a piece of leather in the back of each boot, cut the armpits out of the top and resewing all of the altered areas. Wow, people sure moved fast in New York. Time was money and they wasted very little of it at Brooks. It was a pace that I soon got use to if only to survive.

As on Hagenbeck-Wallace, I was selected to head the entrance of the main spec "Nepal" which starred Frank "Bring Them Back Alive" Buck. The Garden lights were darkened and I stepped out from behind the huge doors on the entrance ramp. On cue, on came a solitary spotlight focused on me, the band started playing with a flourish, and I did a short baton routine, culminating in my throwing the baton into the air. When it descended and I caught it, the doors behind me were thrown opened, and I high stepped forward to lead the spec around the Garden floor. One can only imagine the thrill to me, a small town seventeen year old, finding myself in the New York spotlight, even if it was for just a brief minute.

My small triumph masked for me the troubles that were in store for the circus. It was but a few days later when there was a working men's strike at the outset of the performance. We all pitched in moving props, assisting with the rigging and generally acting like prop men when we were not actually performing. The *coup de theatre* was when thirty or so performers (including me) pushed, shoved and pulled Gargantua's cage around the hippodrome track to the thunderous applause of an appreciative audience. It had something to do with "the show must go on" and we really believed it. This cast was well casted.



We somehow got through this strike and the labor unrest that was fermenting just below the surface during the day by day activities. Finally the Garden date was completed to reasonably good business. All the intended and non-intended publicity must have helped considerably. However, coming from the show's main office, there were ominous reports that the business was not as good as expected. Mr. North clearly claimed this situation in requesting a reduction of salaries of performers and workmen. The union officials representing the workmen were adamant regarding the integrity of the union agreement signed with Ringling in 1937. They threatened to close the circus with a strike if necessary. Mr. North was equally steadfast, indicating that he would close the show if the union did not accede to his position. With the polemics from both sides raging about closing the show, it is little wonder that it was destiny to be realized. The threats and counter threats went on through the indoor Boston date. The first outdoor date was Brooklyn and North and the American Federation of Actors continued to exchange views that often evolved in accusations. As I was a fledgling performer, I had no real sense of the right or wrong of it. Money was not important to me because I had no responsibilities other than myself, and most of my needs were taken care of by the circus at no charge. If a cut in pay resulted, I was sure that I could survive with a few less chocolate sundaes and Hershey Bars. I really was only interested in performing and learning. That was my sole focus.

After Brooklyn, the Washington date followed and I had the opportunity to visit the nation's capital for the first time. The museums and exhibits were wonderful, awe inspiring to be sure but not overwhelming as New York City. Baltimore and Philadelphia were next and then the multiple day stands ended for a while. Business seemed good, but the front office still claimed that it was not.

I realized later that a full house did not necessarily mean that business was terrific. It did in some local-

ities, but in others such as Chicago and Kansas City, thousands of passes were given to city officials who used them as part of the political patronage to the local voters. So people in the stands did not always translate into money in the till. I didn't know if Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia were similar to Chicago and Kansas City in paper houses.

In any event, the real life on the circus had begun: unload, erect, perform, tear down, load up and travel. Within a few days, we never knew the name of the town we were playing or at least we were never very conscious of it. They were all "today's town" unless there was a particular reason to take note of its name. It was far more important to know how close the performers' cars were to the lot than the name of the town that the lot was located in. Such is the orientation when one is on the move every day.

We made a quick tour of Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York state and prepared for our annual foray into New England. Business was not good in many of the towns due to the extensive labor unrest in many of the cities in the Midwest. Strident unionism was doing battle with equally strident management in many of the industrial centers and strikes were extant all over the place. People were conserving their money to buy bread and not circus tickets, so business took a nose dive. This resulted in more threats from Mr. North and counter threats from the union. I recall on several occasions we were delayed from leaving a stand because of air hoses being cut on the train, disabling

the train's braking system. Late arrivals did not help business either. But the performance went on every day, uncut in the main.

I was very comfortable in my role as a "general useful," working with the elephants as well as working in the spec, and filling in on the horses when someone was ill or otherwise couldn't be in attendance, and being constantly stretched in the trap act. I was growing up as a performer and happy to do so.

A studio publicity photo taken in 1942.



Scranton, Pennsylvania was one town that we did take note of the name, although not on the morning

of June 22, 1938. Deep in the anthracite coal belt, Scranton was centered in one of the strongest union areas in the United States. It had a union mayor and work force. The day started off normally enough with the circus being set up in a timely manner. However, around six in the afternoon everything on the lot stopped and the union members went on strike. We didn't know what this meant. Surely we would get additional workmen and continue as before. But it seems, the union had selected its strike location well because replacement workmen were not available. Either North had to accede to the union's demands, or the show would be closed. North said "no," and the union said "hell no" and that was that. Mrs. Charles Ringling made an impassioned plea to the performers to continue but this was like preaching to the choir. The vast majority of the performers didn't support the strike anyway and were fully loyal to the circus.



These views were not shared by the working men and they made their position known with threats of violence against the show. I didn't personally feel threatened nor did I fear for my safety. I don't think any other performer was personally apprehensive but perhaps performer leaders organizing support for the management, such as Art Concello, were. I don't recall anyone expressing such a fear and we had plenty of time on our hands to do so.

The circus was stranded on the lot for the next few days. Some of us interpreted this delay as a sign that the management was intending to start up again. We really didn't understand the control that the union had over the labor force precluded such an event. There was an eerie feeling on the lot with the empty big top gently flapping in the light breeze, with no music from the band, no rush of performers, no crowds milling about with their cries of excitement and shouts of approval. There was nothing. It seemed that everyone disappeared. We were there and yet we weren't. Ghosts of performances past. A dead silence. The weather then seemed to contribute to the foreboding by becoming excruciatingly hot. Then even the breeze died out. Most performers stayed on because we didn't know where to go.

We all knew almost all circuses were having a most difficult time of it. The Tim McCoy Wild West had already closed in Washington before we even got to that city. Cole Bros. and Robbins Bros. were reducing the nut in every way possible and certainly not hiring performers or staffers. Hagenbeck-Wallace, my old circus, was allegedly in chaos and was rumored to be closing practically every day. So we stayed on. At least we were eating. The cookhouse remained active and functioning. For the next few days, we loitered around the lot. Scranton is not one of the top tourist spots in the United States in the best of times and this certainly wasn't the best of anything. Although



The center ring elephant act in 1943 with Kitty on top.

it was being said around the lot that John Ringling North was in Scranton conducting negotiations with the union, we never saw him. He may have restricted himself to his private car on the train. Not surprisingly, there were frequent tales coming from all directions with all sorts of solutions to the problem at hand. None of them were factually based but they gave us something to do in repeating them with a bit of gloss of our own. Finally, on June 27th, we got the official word to pack up and leave, not for the next town but to the one town whose name we were intimately familiar: Sarasota. It was all over.

So it was back to Florida for this young lady along with the rest of the troupe that had headed north but three months before. At least I had a good home to return to in Indiana. After spending a day saying good-byes to my many new friends, I entrained for Elkhart. I was enthusiastically greeted at the station by Mom and Dad a short time later. Much chatter followed during the evening meal at home. Mom was very interested in sharing some of my impressions of New York City and the other ports of call in the East. Funny, she never asked my impression of Scranton. On the other hand, Dad was particularly interested in the strike and the future of the circus. With all the national publici-

ty of the closing of the show, many of my friends and relatives called to find out the latest news from the resident authority. I willingly poured forth all my views of the world from the center ring, filling in with my imagination where I didn't have the facts. How much does a seventeen old really know? Not much, I suspect.

But things were happening unbeknownst to me. Before leaving Sarasota, Pat Valdo told

me that the circus may indeed go out again and asked me for a contact point which I gladly gave him. Sure enough, it wasn't long before I received a telegram from Valdo requesting that I return to Sarasota in about a week and rejoin the show for a new opening. That was the entire message but I assumed that the Ringling show was going back on the road starting somewhere in New England. Before I knew it, once again I was on a passenger train heading south, only this time in the heat of summer. Air conditioning of the passenger cars was still in the future, so this journey was spent in mutual sweat. Upon arriving in Sarasota in a blazing sun, I quickly learned that many performers had not left the Sarasota area, hoping that a new beginning would take place shortly. Their optimism paid off because in a few days we were heading north again on an abbreviated Ringling train. We were still very anxious about our future.

After a couple of days rambling about the Midwest, we arrived in Redfield, South Dakota and joined the Al G. Barnes-Sells-Floto Circus. It wasn't going to be Ringling Bros. after all. It was going to something else. Or was it? The merged circus turned out to more like a mini-Ringling show than an expanded Barnes-Floto outfit. For instance, many of the Barnes-Floto personnel were displaced by former Ringling people. This was particularly true in



the staffers and some of the featured performers. There were lots of familiar faces. The "Nepal" spec wasn't used; the former Barnes spec was said to be used. Yet we had the Ringling "Nepal" costumes and my role in the spec was exactly as before. It sure looked like "Nepal" to me. And Frank Buck, my old Hagenbeck-Wallace friend Terrell Jacobs, the Cristianis and, of course, Gargantua were all there. Mr. Gargantua was paraded around the hippodrome track as before. The Ringling big top and menagerie were also used by the show. So it was different, yet the same. It was sad seeing the departure of loyal show folks who lost their jobs just because they were on the junior show at the time of the merger. This was especially true because so few circus jobs were available. Nevertheless, the merger went smoothly enough with the teething problems over in a couple of days. In a week, we couldn't recall being on another show just one month previously. I was with lots of old friends and plenty of new ones.

And show titles! I never knew that there were so many. Sometimes toward that latter part of the season, we were called Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey, Al G. Barnes, Sells-Floto, and John Robinson. I suspect that some town folks believed that they were going to be visited by all of the existing circuses in America in a single day. How much confusion these various titles caused the towners, I never knew. But I did know that they enjoyed the performance and so did I.

Much of July and August was spent in the Middle West with some towns the same as I played the year previously on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. On July 28th, we played South Bend, Indiana which was only a few miles from my home in Elkhart. There were more than a few welcome faces in the audience including Mom and Dad, my sis-

ter and a whole group of high school chums. I did my very best during the performance and I knew that they were very proud of me, especially when I led the whole performance off. It was a great day of performing and visiting. I introduced the entire entourage to every show person who was unfortunate enough to pass within shouting distance. I probably caused the greatest disturbance on the circus grounds since the strike in Scranton. It was just one of those wonderful days of the circus life, which often took one so far from loved ones and then took the performer right up to his or her doorstep. Sometimes it was little wonder why certain people stayed with the circus year after year. The gratification peaks were very high.

As fall began, business conditions improved somewhat and with this good economic news our business picked up as well. The violent strikes, so prevalent in the springtime, were seldom occurring. We were also in the South where the unions were not nearly as strong. It appeared that domestic tranquility was reestablished. We were deep into Texas with the advent of October replicating the traditional Ringling late fall route with multiple-day stands in Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio and, of course, Houston. It turned out that Houston became one of my favorite cities. The weather

Kitty Clark on a 1944 Ringling-Barnum lithograph.

was nearly always pleasant in October; the business always good; the audiences very responsive and appreciative. And did I mention the stores? They were easy to get to by trolley, and clothes were attractively priced. Surprisingly, there seemed to be many places worth seeing in the area. So if shopping was completed (as difficult as that is to imagine), there were places to see, with good restaurants to boot.

The fun of Houston quickly turned to the shivers of North Carolina and Tennessee as the thermometer plummeted. Water was often frozen in the train plumbing. When this occurred, we had to resort to quick cold bucket baths, and I mean quick. Sometimes I doubted if the water ever touched my skin. It was like bathing with ice cubes. We wore coats or sweaters over our costumes until it was a second before our time to go into our act. Fortunately, once my twirling began, my rapid movements heightened my circulation and I was warm in a very short time, at least for a while. It was another test for this troupier and another test met, although not with gusto.

We somehow knew that when we renewed our season with the Barnes-Ringling aggregation that we would end up in Sarasota instead of the long-standing Barnes Baldwin Park, California quarters. Having spent Thanksgiving in West Palm Beach, Florida courtesy of the circus, we closed three days later in Sarasota.

My first year on Ringling turned out to be quite different than I anticipated. Notwithstanding, like the circus, I made it through another tumultuous season with a very positive outlook for the future, a future that I was sure would be on The Greatest Show on Earth.

1939

As a troupier, I was learning there was more to the cir-





cus than the summer, under-canvas tour. Now that I had a measure of experience and some circus skills, I had something to offer to indoor circus promoters in their various ventures, primarily Shrine engagements. So over the couple of the deep winter months, I played Shrine dates in Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland, either as an adjunct to riding acts, working elephants in the ring, as a ladder lady and/or performing my specialty, twirling the baton where appropriate. The salary doubled my \$20 per week pay on Ringling. However, I had to pay for room and board, so I was saving very little out my weekly stipend. But in reality I was getting an education in perfecting my existing skills and gaining many more in the process. I going to school for free and enjoying it immensely.

Once the holiday season was over and one or two Shrine dates beyond, it was time to return to Florida again. This time I motored down with a friend who was also joining the show. Dad had a trunk made for me and with this I knew I became an official circus person. All I needed were two water buckets and I would be fully accoutered. It wasn't long before I had those two buckets, properly monikered. Look how far I came in three years, my very own buckets with my name on them! That portended great things to come.

Quickly settling in Sarasota, I found that Pat Valdo had planned on expanding my role in the performance. I was still to be a "generally useful," but even more so. More work on the swinging ladder. Also, developing the skills of an acrobat became very much a part of my every day activities. This extended beyond winter quarters to include daily practice in the Garden and on the road. Special muscles were utilized in holding people on my shoulders, doing hand stands, flips, etc. and these muscles came to me only with considerable pain and aggravation. But by mid-season, I was very comfortable performing these routines. This is not to say that my twirling suffered attention. "Nepal" was back and with it, my leading off the spec



Kitty in the Arthur Konyot horse act in 1943

in the identical fashion as in the previous season.

My costume was refreshed but essentially the same. Frank Buck was no longer with the circus but there was a man that was similarly dressed in white jungle garb. The show did not make any effort to dissuade anyone from thinking that this was the real Frank Buck. He did look like him atop the elephant. I also had one very exciting role and that was as a chariot driver in the closing number of the performance. It did not take me very long to develop the hand strength to direct and guide four spirited horses at full gallop around the hippodrome track. I simply loved it, often being admonished by both Pat Valdo and Fred Bradna for driving too fast, but the threat of a speeding ticket in the big top was a highly unlikely event as there were no posted speed limits.

Once again, New York loomed directly ahead as did the long trip north, the Belvedere and Brooks costuming, rehearsals, opening night, the spotlight, however brief, the glamour, the wonderful performance. Was it a press triumph? Personally, perhaps. The show? For sure. Business? Not hardly. It was obvious even to my naive eyes that many of the performances were not as well attended as 1938, a year that was said to be down. It may have been due to the World's Fair which was to begin just after we completed our

run. Still everyone was optimistic, especially knowing that the reviews of the show were universally positive.

As bad as the Garden business was, Long Island City was worse. Long Island City was our initial under-canvas date, substituting for the traditional week-long Brooklyn date which was lost because of the lack of a suitable lot. Although Long Island City may sound like a different city than New York, it was in fact an integral part of the city. It was just over the Queensboro Bridge, no more

than 1,500 feet from Manhattan. It was part of the Borough of Queens in the midst of a great population center. The lot was much closer to Broadway than the soon-to-open World's Fair which was located in the Flushing section of Queens. So, we had lots of people nearby. But they must have stayed nearby because they never came to the circus. Our new, air conditioned, four pole big top was alone in all its glory.

It was a week of practice, or at least it seemed so, because there weren't many folks in the audience. Now some of us were getting concerned because it appeared that we may have been in for a repeat of last year's early closing. It doesn't take much to start rumors in the back yard of the circus. Rumors circulate even if there isn't a reason. When there could be a reason, the rumors proliferate. The most strident rumor was that the circus would close if the early multi-day stands did not produce.

It is my nature to be optimistic. The sun will always shine tomorrow. I firmly believe that most people associated with the circus are optimists too. How else could one risk his or her life or fortune every day with all of the uncontrollable influences that affect the circus. In this case, optimism paid off because as bad as business was in Long Island City, it was just the opposite in Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia which immediately followed. We had many full houses, and a fair number of turnaways thrown in as well. Business was reasonably good in our swing



through the Midwest and very good in New England. After a fine day in Portland, Maine, we entered Canada for a few days. It was in Hamilton, Ontario that I got a real fright that was due to my own carelessness.

It was after the night show and I had lingered at the lot just chatting with several show folks. When I looked about, all the gals had already left for the train and the buses must have been at the cars. The runs were around a mile away from the lot. The moon was bright and the night pleasantly warm so I decided to walk. Having gone only a few blocks I sensed that someone was following me. I turned and saw three raunchy-looking men walking at a fast pace. They called to me in French. I had no idea what they said but I imagined the worst. I was practically running by now, as were they. All at once I heard a great tussle. Turning, I immediately recognized Mr. Blue, a huge black man who was on the circus many for years. He was built like Mike Tyson, only much taller. His name derived from the fact that he was so black that in the sun, his skin would shine and take on a blue hue. We always had a couple of minutes chat when I would see him on the lot. I use to lend him \$5 each payday so that he could play craps. In any event, he grabbed two of the pursuers by their necks, lifting them literally off the ground in doing so. He then flung them almost across the street. Mr. Blue looked for the third man, but he probably was running through Quebec by then. Mr. Blue then escorted me to the train.

When we got there a number of performers were sitting on the rails, as was the custom on a warm night, eating sandwiches and drinking pop. They ribbed me about having a black boyfriend but I told them that Mr. Blue was most welcome to walk me to the train any time he was so disposed. He probably saved me great harm and I was always grateful. Thereafter I lent him \$7 on payday and was very happy

to do so. Oh yes, he did walk me to the train on many occasions over the next few years.

As we progressed back through the Midwest to Chicago we were all a buzz because the circus was going to the West Coast for the first time since 1934. That meant almost all of the show gals would be visiting California as neophytes, me included. Both the 1937 Hagenbeck-Wallace and the 1938 augmented Barnes-Floto routes stayed east of the Rockies. Now the golden west was on the horizon. It wasn't much more than a week after Chicago that we were being exposed to the marvelous vistas in western Canada courtesy of the Canadian Railroad and Ringling Bros. The locals spoke a bit unusual, especially when they pronounced their "o's." But they made themselves clear at the ticket wagon because business was very good at most stands.

A short jaunt through Montana and Eastern Washington and there we were, the Pacific Ocean. We went sight seeing at almost every stand. I even got up early to do so. (At this

Kitty as the "Queen of the Mermaids" in the 1944 spec Panto's Paradise.



stage of my life, I seldom arose earlier than noon, often missing lunch and, almost always breakfast. I would grab a sandwich at the grease joint on the lot when I got there.)<sup>5</sup> Life on the West Coast appeared to be more casual and relaxed than the Midwest. The contrast was even greater when compared to the East Coast. I loved to go window shopping in the very nice department stores found in all of the major cities such as Seattle, Portland, and especially San Francisco and Los Angeles.

It was hot-hot-hot during our five day Los Angeles stand but who cared. I might be discovered in a drug store like Lana Turner. Well I sat on as many drug store stools as time permitted to no avail. I wasn't discovered by anyone other than Babe the elephant. But I did have fun. I did meet a college classmate of John Ringling North's who was an independent writer who sold his work to a variety of national publications such as *Life*, *Colliers*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. His name was Joseph Bryan. While in Los Angeles, he and Mr. North took me to the Trocadero night club for dinner and the show. They ordered me a chocolate ice cream soda while they imbibed their favorite liquid refreshments. We had a wonderful time, primarily because Bryan had a sharp sense of humor and would turn any circumstance into a very funny story.

It was obvious that North truly enjoyed his brand of humor as did I. I star-gazed aplenty that night. Myrna Loy, Cary Grant, Clark Gable and Randolph Scott<sup>6</sup> all came over to the table to say hello to Mr. North. I was in seventh heaven throughout the entire evening. We missed the circus train so we had to drive to Long Beach, the next stand, in North's chauffeured limo. We arrived at daybreak in front of *Jomar*, his private car. There stood North's French wife Genevieve. She screamed at him in French and glared at me in American. I was



stunned because it was all very innocent. What she didn't realize was that Bryan was gathering information on me for an article that he was writing for *Colliers* which was published in the April 19, 1941 issue.<sup>7</sup> It contained a three quarter page color photo of me and Ruth the elephant, not unlike the lithograph that featured Ruth and me about the same time. The article was the first about me in a national publication and Bryan accurately captured who I was and how I lived (like so many of the single show gals) while traveling with the Greatest Show On Earth.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the tour in Southern California, movie stars often sat in the audience. It was hard for me to perform because I was starring at them all the time, frequently tripping over myself because I wasn't paying attention to what I was doing. Joe E. Brown, the famous comedian, watched the show and then came into the backyard to meet some of the performers. His daughter was with him and it was her birthday present to go to the circus. He told me that he had been a circus performer for a number of years. He insisted that his daughter, he and I have a picture taken together which of course we did. Later in Elkhart, I received an 8 x 10 glossy of the photograph which I have to this day in my scrap book. What a special thrill for me at this young age to meet such a famous and thoughtful man.

Leaving California, we stopped at El Centro for a date in the desert. It must have been 120 degrees at the top of the tent with the alleged air conditioning units consuming ice by the ton. We were doing the human chain trap act when the gal next to me said in almost a moan, "Kitty, I think I am going to faint." With this comment, she did just that. I instinctively grabbed her around the waist. The entire remaining human chain screamed as one down to the rigging men on the ground. We needed to be lowered to the ground immediately. However, the rigging men were not looking up at us but were watching Merle Evans frantically waving to them. They couldn't hear us because



Kitty, on far left, with girls in the aerial display in 1944.

of the loudness of the band and the roar of the crowd. Finally, after an eternity, they glanced up and saw our plight. By the time we were lowered, my arm was completely numb. I don't think I could have held her much longer, because without any feeling in the arm, I sensed I was losing my grip. Everything turned out OK because the gal was quickly revived and the show went on as if nothing had happened, which fortunately, it didn't. I was toasted as the "Heroine for the Day" the next day in Phoenix.

The season rapidly came to an end. We moved into Texas for three weeks including another three day stand in Houston. More shopping. Then in a short time, we were hitting the high spots in Florida, culminating in a three day stand in Miami and the closer in Tampa the next day. I discovered that sand can be as debilitating to a circus as mud because at West Palm Beach wagons sunk to their bottoms in a sand that did not provide any support whatsoever. Both elephants and tractors were tested to their fullest that day. As usual they proved their mettle.

It was back to Sarasota, packing up, the goodbye with tears, and the long trip north to Elkhart with tears again of hello. The 1939 season proved to be a maturing year for me. I learned more. I gave more of myself in performing. I eagerly looked forward to 1940 as an even more broadening experience, which it turned out to be.

#### EPILOGUE

Kitty and the writer were still

fleshing out 1939 as 1991 came to a close. We planned to begin the coverage of the 1940 season in February 1992. In December 1991, Kitty scheduled a trip to Atlanta, where her son was living. She never returned. She suffered a stroke in January 1992, the day when she planned to return to her home in Florida. Over the next few months, the writer spoke with her often while she was recovering. It was clear that no one so vibrant and apparently healthy could possibly be in a

life-threatening position. But the ignorance of the writer aside, that was indeed the situation. Kitty's condition deteriorated rapidly in the last few weeks. She died in a quiet moment in May 1992. She just slipped away, a final call and that was it.

With Kitty's death, there were no building blocks left. I knew snippets of her life after 1939. However, I would be presumptuous to set forth what I think took place. But with my extensive discussions with Kitty, there are certain events that I can relate without violating any trust reposed with me.

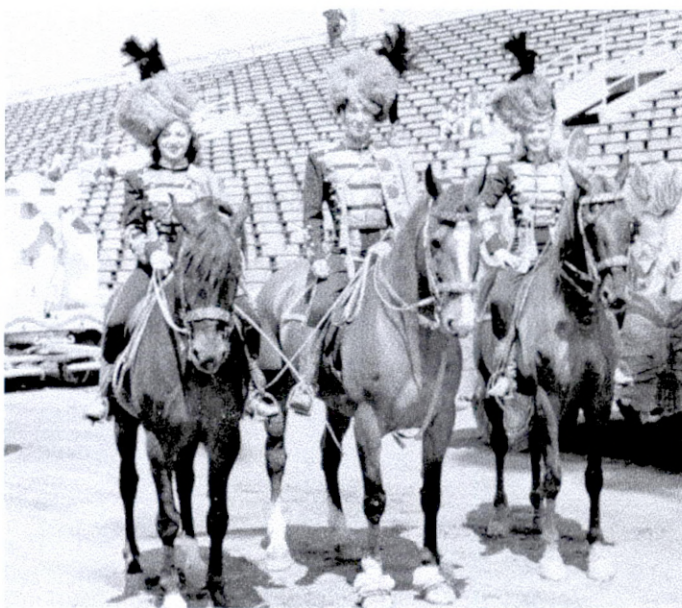
I do know that Kitty married Willis Lawson (later day Ringling-Barnum executive) around 1940. It was a short marriage. She spoke highly of Lawson and confirmed the Hagenbeck-Wallace jitney service in a phone call to him. From 1940 to 1946 Kitty continued with Ringling as the featured showgirl. Her twirling was an attraction during the spec at least through 1941. The writer has some film depicting Kitty in her various assignments in the 1941-1945 performances. During the Robert Ringling years (1943-1945), Kitty was at the apex of her circus career. She worked with the Konyot troupe, highlighted in the various elephant acts, drove the chariot in specs such as "Hold Your Horses," was the payoff float mistress in the spec "Panto's Paradise" and "Toyland," was the white dressed queen in "Alice in Circus Wonderland" and, of course, was found in all of the variants of "The Changing of the Guard."



She was one busy young lady, probably in as many acts as anyone in the performance. She also sustained a fair number of injuries during this period. Her legs became particularly vulnerable, to the extent that when she was injured during the 1946 Garden date, her attending physician had a heart to heart with her. She was unequivocally told that if she continued her jumping on and off elephants, riding horses in a dangerous fashion, pushing the envelope, it was just a matter of time before she would no longer walk. She would be crippled for life.

She never returned to the circus as a performer. However, warnings aside, she decided that perhaps her future rested in becoming a lion tamer. So she contacted Terrell Jacobs regarding her ambitions. He agreed to her coming on the act, then in the Middle West. This foray lasted a very short time. Lion taming wasn't her. So she returned to Elkhart to decide her future. Her circus career was over at the young age of twenty-five. That a Circus Fans Association tent was named in her honor in Elkhart did little to compensate.

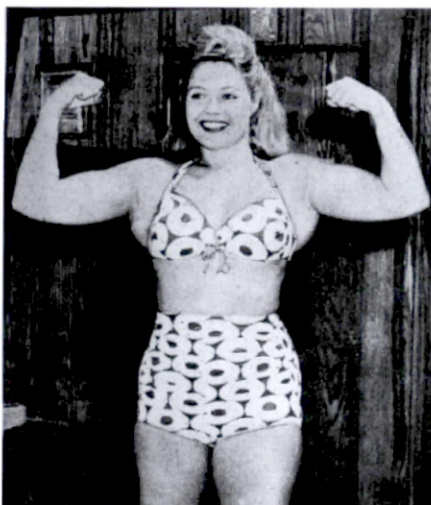
I do not know when Harold Van Orman reentered the scene. It may be that he saw her when Ringling played the Northern part of Indiana during her tenure on the show. I do know that they were married in June 1946 in Chicago. Harriet Hodgini had divorced him in 1945. He was sixty-four and she was twenty-six. They were both prominent enough that it was picked up by all the New York newspapers. The *New York Daily News*, a tabloid with a weekday circulation of almost three million, carried a large picture of Kitty in circus costume as part of its coverage. I thought the *Daily News* showed good taste in doing so. Van Orman was thirty-five years her senior. Nevertheless they had a good marriage. He was still a brilliant speaker, always in demand. He remained a strong and influential



Dorita and Arthur Konyot with Kitty on right in 1944.

Republican. They had an interesting and constantly evolving circle of friends. His chain of hotels was expanding. The Van Ormans traveled widely during most of their marriage until his various maladies made travel impossible. He was incapacitated during final months of his life. He died in December 1958, almost ten years to the day after her father died fighting the fire at Ralph Brown's furniture store in Elkhart. Van Orman's death and the fact that his wife was the former Kitty Clark was again picked up by the New York

This photo of Kitty appeared in the October 1946 issue of the *Police Gazette*.



papers in great detail. They were papers in great detail. They were still prominent folks.

A full page article about Kitty and Van Orman appeared in the January 2, 1947 *American Weekly*, a national Sunday newspaper supplement.

Kitty later married Lloyd Gentry, a prominent horse trainer. She traveled extensively with him on the racing circuit. She shared a moment of glory when a Gentry-trained horse won the Kentucky Derby. More importantly, Kitty was blessed by a son, Lloyd Gentry, Jr. She became a doting mother, enjoying her son throughout all the phases of youth. When he reached adulthood, Kitty volunteered at a local hospital, working four days each week, giving of herself, making the uncomfortable more comfortable. The family home was established in Stuart, Florida. It was from there that Kitty sojourned north to Atlanta. The trip south never happened.

#### NOTES

1. Kitty told the writer that there were four great tragedies in her otherwise wonderful life. The first was the death of her dear brother when he suffered an accident in his mid-teens. He was her "big brother" in all senses of the phrase. The second tragedy was the death of her father in 1948, while fighting a fire in his capacity as fire chief. The third was the Hartford circus fire. Notwithstanding her steadfastness in the face of danger during and immediately the fire, she lived with the horrible deaths for many years to come. The acrid smell of burnt flesh never left her. The last took place on May 6, 1945 when in the finale of the Torrence and Victoria act, Frank Torrence's grasp of his wife's foot loosened and Victoria fell to the Garden's floor. She fell at Kitty's feet, near death in a mass of broken bones and obviously experiencing extensive internal bleeding. Victoria died on the way to the hospital. She was a close friend of Kitty's.

2. Although Kitty stated that her



father made her baton and it was the first of its kind, greatly facilitating her accomplishing difficult routines, this writer was not aware until recently that her father was a world class twirler himself. He became interested watching the first Marine Division's drum major making clever sweeps with his staff when directing the band during parades. With that inspiration, he practiced with a crude baton that he made while still in the Marines and a more sophisticated one, after he was discharged, shortly after returning from the war. He went on to write a popular booklet on band formations. As many know, Elkhart was the capital of American band instrument manufacturing. Mr. Clark was connected with Conn Instruments as an advisor in field band instrumentation.

3. Kitty was not overstating her place in the local press at Elkhart. She was already a local celebrity because of winning the national baton championship two years earlier. She was also well known because of her being the head majorette in a city where the band played a principal role in all civic events. (pun intended). The early strip ads of Hagenbeck-Wallace stated in bold print "With CATHERINE (sic) CLARK, Elkhart's own National Drum Major Champion, leading the big show band of forty." A couple of days prior to the show day, there was a sizable picture of Kitty holding a rag doll. In the supporting text, in response to the question "How is Catherine (sic) getting along in the circus?," an advance agent of the show said "I can best answer that by quoting a circus expression I heard one of the performers use recently in referring to her. He said, 'Say, that little girl from Elkhart isn't a May 1 guy—she's show-folks!' Than which there could be no higher tribute paid by circus people" (you don't say).

The fact that the Hagenbeck-Wallace press agents just couldn't get the correct spelling of Kitty's given name, was not shared by the local newspaper. It knew who Kitty was, spelling and all. For instance, on show day, The Elkhart *Truth* pictured Kitty, Gracie Hanneford and Senorita Alicia Villa on the front page and titled it "On the Lot With Katherine." The day after the performance, the *Truth* discussed the

circus day. It stated that the show had a most difficult time setting up because of a muddy lot. The afternoon performance was three hours late. It noted a straw house at the night performance. The *Truth* carried a wonderful picture of Kitty being given a bouquet of flowers by the local Commander 'of the American Legion. Kitty was fully costumed and atop an elephant. She appears gracious far beyond her tender years. It was noted in another article that Kitty had been the honorary drum major at local and state American Legion bugle bands for the past several years.

4. At this writing, the Hotel Belvedere still exists, but it is no longer frequented by circus personnel because the Garden of Kitty's era is long gone. Madison Square Garden still manages to roam around New York. It is currently located at the site of the former Pennsylvania Station on 34th and 7th Avenues, almost a 1/2 mile from Madison Square. But now at least, it is headed in the right direction back toward Madison Square.

5. Like many people, Kitty's waking habits changed as she got a bit older. As time went on, she often ate breakfast on the lot. She gained a reputation of having a prodigious appetite. Once she won a contest by eating twenty-one pancakes at a single sitting. She did relate that it was years before she ever ate another pancake. She also said that she tended to

Katherine and Harold Van Orman in 1947.



eat the same amount in the summer during the highly active performing season, and the winter when she wasn't nearly as active. She would gain up to twenty pounds in the winter and had to pay the price during first two months of the Ringling-Barnum season.

6. Although Kitty knew John Ringling North in a professional relationship, he was justifiably distant in his interfaces with his employees. This was not the case with Robert Ringling with whom Kitty enjoyed a close friendship. During Robert's regime as president, Kitty grew in stature as a feature of the performance. She was highlighted when the performance so permitted. She had the warmest words when speaking about him. Unfortunately, we never had the opportunity to explore the possibility of Ringling no longer being in control in 1946 which could have contributed to her decision to leave the circus.

7. In Earnest Albrecht's book, *A Ringling By Any Other Name*, he stated that John Ringling North and Germaine met at a Christmas Eve party at Maxim's in Paris in 1939. If this is correct, then the episode between Germaine and Kitty could not have taken place in October 1939 as related. The circus did not play the West Coast in 1940. It did play there in late 1941 well after the Bryan article was published in *Colliers*. I can't imagine that Kitty had a chocolate ice cream soda in 1941. It may have been a combination of two separate events that melded in time as one.

8. Kitty was the subject of many feature articles in local and national publications. She was even a centerfold subject (although not in the same sense as *Playboy*). She graced the July 1945 edition of the *National Police Gazette* in a full page color picture entitled "Queen of the Circus." It said "Kitty Clark, the 6-foot Elkhart, Indiana beauty who made good in the Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey Circus, poses atop Ruth, one of the show's sixty elephants, as clown Paul Jerome admires the view. Kitty, a former drum majorette, is an accomplished equestrienne, chariot driver and elephant trainer." She was also pictured in 1946 and 1947 issues of the *Police Gazette*.

Kitty was featured in a number of Ringling-Barnum lithographs, including the glamorous pink background depiction of her with a white horse. The circus was still using this poster well into the 1950's.



# The Heritage and History of the Cole Bros. AMERICA STEAM CALLIOPE

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

*Dedicated to the memory of my father, Fred Dahlinger, Sr., 1920-1997*

The steam calliope is an icon of the American circus. Its unique, inescapable sounds keynoted the arrival of circus day, an event which interrupted the routine of life with an interlude of entertainment. Perhaps the most famous of the one hundred or more steamers which once graced circuses is the Cole Bros. America. It is one of just five calliope wagons to have survived substantially intact from the 1872 to 1950 heyday of the instrument on circuses. This paper documents the 1903 origin and subsequent history of the America wagon and the calliope which now resides in it, along with the corroborating elements of the heritage which preceded its 1940 creation.

The America steam calliope embodies the tradition of adaptation

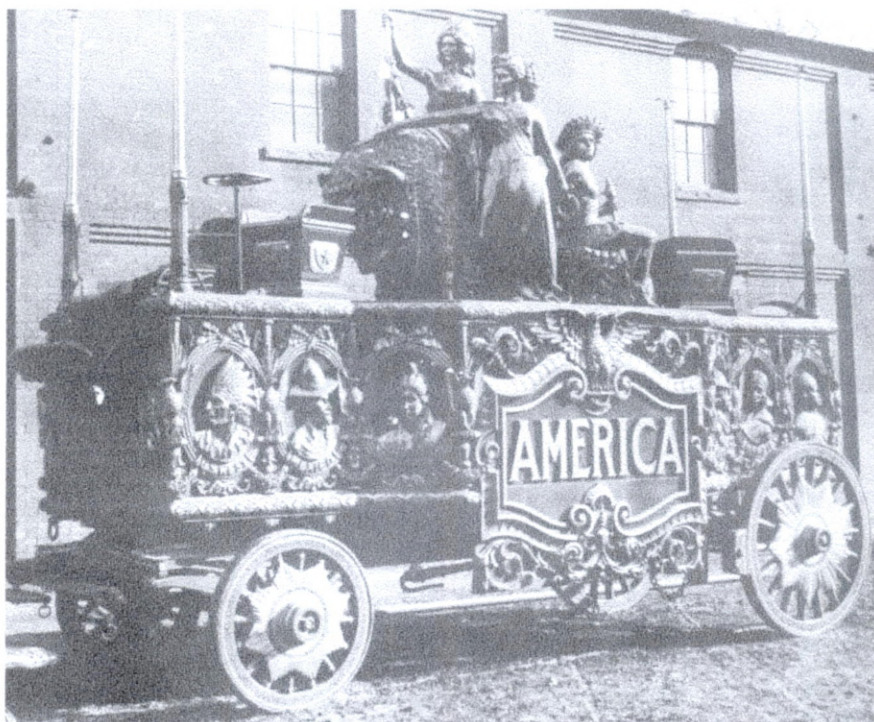
by the American circus. Originally built to serve strictly for parade purposes as a telescoping tableau, America was altered to become a dual-duty parade and baggage hauling wagon. Later it was modified a second time to house and carry a steam calliope. The America represents the practice of salvaging a calliope instrument from a steamboat and installing it in a circus wagon. The instrument in the America was the one heard in the daily 1939 Cole Bros. Circus street parades, the last to utilize wood wagons with carved ornamentation. The America is the only circus steam calliope to have appeared in a Presidential inaugural parade, rolling in the 1949 Truman procession. It was also the last steam calliope to be utilized by a railroad tent circus.

The America tableau in original configuration in the Bridgeport winter quarters. Pfening Archives.

The fame of the America calliope does not stem from long-term circus use, for it was not used as such until 1940. It is largely through mass media exposure of it as a novelty, and its four decades as a museum artifact, that it has become venerated as a great artifact of American history. It is likely that the America has been seen and heard by more Americans than any other steam calliope, given its daily exposure at Circus World Museum from 1959 to c.1970 and in the parades which have been staged by the institution.

The identification of the Cole Bros. America Steam Calliope changed through the years of its existence, the terminology following the modifications which were made to it. Initially as a telescoping tableau on the Barnum & Bailey Circus from 1903 to 1916, and later as a box body tableau on Barnum & Bailey in 1917 and 1918 and Christy Bros. from 1925 to 1930, it was generally referred to by its theme name. For example, the formally printed and extensively detailed 1903 parade list issued by the Barnum & Bailey show specified the wagon as "America," with no further identification of the wagon style or contents. The same one word name was used in the show's 1910s inventories.<sup>1</sup> On the Christy show in 1926, the style of the wagon was termed both "an allegorical float or tableau" and a "band tableau."<sup>2</sup> A 1929 Christy loading order compiled by show attache Fletcher Smith listed the wagon as "No. 31 America bandwagon, small tops and parade trappings, 19 foot."<sup>3</sup> In a 1935 sale document, Christy used the plural form "Tableaux" to describe the America and similar wagons.<sup>4</sup>

No Cole Bros. wagon lists or loading orders have been located, precluding any effort to determine what the wagon was called from 1935 to 1950. During the years 1935 to 1938 it was assigned the number 72. After alter-





ation to a calliope in 1940, it was given the number 76, a designation that lasted just one season. One can speculate that the number 76 was intentionally assigned as a contraction of the year 1776. The steam calliope is a thoroughly and uniquely American invention and institution. Given that the wagon was themed America, using the spirit of "76" to further identify it would have been appropriate. The fact that many nations and nationalities beyond the United States were represented by the various bas relief portraits was apparently not of concern to those who painted it. No number was applied after it was resurrected and used on Cole between 1946 and 1950.

The story of the America as a calliope commences with the intersecting history of two different circus wagons which were both constructed in 1903, and an instrument which can be traced to 1929. Their paths remained entirely separate until 1940 when portions of each were merged to form the America steam calliope. The history of both vehicles and the instrument will be covered with the initial calliope wagon element addressed first.

One of the wild west aggregations which toured the United States around the turn of the century was the Luella Forepaugh-Fish Wild West Shows, a small railroad show of 1903. The Forepaugh part of the title came from John Forepaugh (1852-1895), widow Luella Fish's first husband and nephew of the great circus man Adam Forepaugh (1831-1890). The second name in the title came from her second husband, George F. Fish, who was once advertising manager for the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. Like many such troupes, the street parade which announced the presence of the show included circus features. One of these was a steam calliope, the first ever built new for a wild west operation.<sup>5</sup> The Forepaugh-Fish machine was built three years after the turn of the century, at the zenith of calliope construction. It was the period of



greatest popularity for the outdoor amusements which relied upon the steam piper to attract an audience. The Forepaugh-Fish calliope exemplified the quintessential medium-sized traveling show steam calliope and in its own time was called the handsomest ever built by Sullivan & Eagle, a well known circus wagon builder of Peru, Indiana. It was outfitted with a 32-whistle steam calliope made by the Thos. J. Nichol Company of Cincinnati, Ohio.<sup>6</sup>

Sullivan & Eagle made parade wagons for small to medium sized circuses and dog and pony operations from the 1880s to the 1910s. The firm was organized in 1879, when Theodore J. Sullivan (1840-1920) partnered with Henry A. Eagle (1850-1938). Their introduction into circus work is thought to have commenced with commissions from local circus man Ben Wallace (1847-1921) in 1884. Sullivan & Eagle is readily identified with at least eight steam calliopes constructed for traveling shows, including near twins featuring large dragons on the side for the Great Wallace (c.1899) and Campbell Bros. (1902) circuses; near twin calliopes for two Gentry Bros. dog and pony troupes (both 1902); and one each for the Great Floto Shows (c. 1904) and the John H. Sparks circus (1910). The only other steamer Sullivan & Eagle built for a wild west outfit was one similar in design to the Forepaugh-Fish machine which went to Pawnee Bill in 1905. Gordon Lillie (1860-1942) stated it cost him \$1900, a figure thirty percent less than the inflated \$3,000 fig-

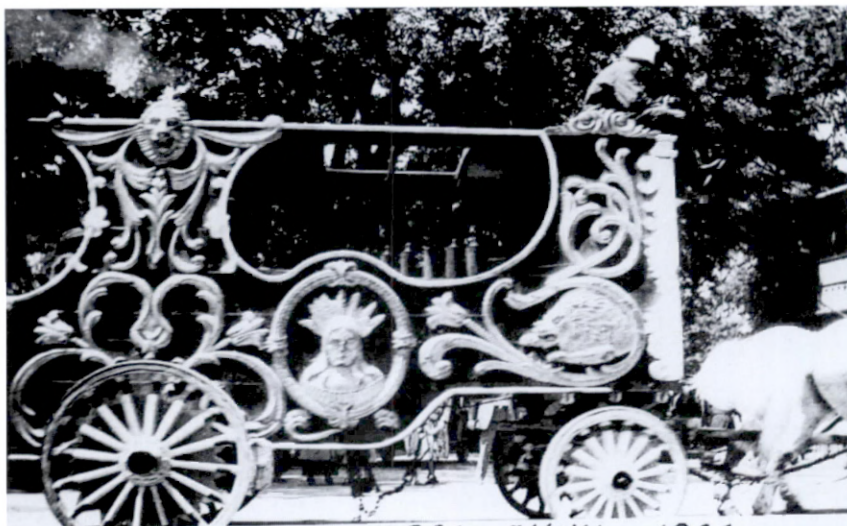
The Forepaugh-Fish calliope on Gollmar Bros. Pfening Archives.

ure which Forepaugh-Fish publicized for its calliope's cost in early 1903.<sup>7</sup>

All of the Sullivan & Eagle calliopes were constructed with a split-roof design, with one section over the player and another covering the boiler, an arrangement which originated in the 1870s. The central opening showcased the instrument, allowing the two rows of whistles to be seen and providing for ready escape of the steam and music into the atmosphere. Each of the Sullivan & Eagle calliopes, with one exception, were covered with finely executed, shallow relief scrollwork and a few bas-relief figures. The Pawnee Bill calliope had a large carved horse on the side, but the specific wild west theme was better represented on the Forepaugh-Fish calliope which included a carved Native American portrait on each side in a centrally positioned oval.

The Cincinnati firm bearing the name of Thomas J. Nichol (1857-1931) was the most prolific builder of steam calliopes. After serving as bookkeeper of the earlier calliope building firm of William Kirkup & Sons, Nichol took over the business in the early 1890s and directed its fortunes until his death. A businessman rather than a foundryman or machinist by trade, his firm dealt in the manufacture of cast and machined brass goods for industry and commercial use, such as valves and fittings. During his tenure the instruments were re-engineered and





sizes increased from the small 20 and 24-whistle calliopes of the Kirkup era to some having as many as 36 whistles. The most popular size had 32 and was first produced about 1898. Nichol advertisements of 1912 placed the cost of a 32-whistle machine at \$550, a price which was discounted to \$400 when the Ringling Bros. purchased one. The Nichol pricing suggests that the cost of the Sullivan & Eagle wagon and its boiler would have been about \$1500, if Pawnee Bill's \$1900 cost included a new instrument.<sup>8</sup>

Nichol's manufacture of the Forepaugh-Fish instrument is not documented in the literature, but its appearance is identical to that of other known Nichol-made calliopes. The original 32-whistle size of the Forepaugh-Fish calliope is verified in several sources. The compass of the Nichol keyboard is from C below middle C to G.<sup>9</sup>

The Forepaugh-Fish show encountered financial difficulties and in an act of investment protection was brought to a finish by Forepaugh-Fish and her husband. At a receiver's sale held in Janesville, Wisconsin on August 1, 1903 the calliope brought a winning bid of \$455 from the Gollmar Bros. Circus representative. The value at that time was stated to be \$2500.<sup>10</sup> In a January 1, 1906 evaluation of their properties, the Gollmars placed a value of \$1,000 on the calliope, which they assigned the number 45. Despite this, their 1906-1907 advertising exaggerated the value to \$5,000.<sup>11</sup>

The Forepaugh-Fish steamer on Christy Bros. in 1926. Pfening Archives.

The calliope remained a Gollmar fixture through the 1916 season, after which the entire show was sold to James Patterson (1860-1948), a carnival operator of Paola, Kansas. Through 1922 Patterson operated a variety of circuses and carnivals which utilized the calliope. It is known to have been with the Patterson & Gollmar Bros. Circus of 1917, the 1919 Patterson & Kline Shows, a carnival, and the James Patterson Circus of 1922. Following the acquisition of a second circus which gave him another steam calliope, Patterson sold the ex-Gollmar machine to Texas showman George W. Christy (1889-1975) in late 1922. After a season or two Christy proceeded to rebuild it in a shorter, more compact, version to occupy less train space. He assigned it number 72 in at least one season and the number 23 in 1929.<sup>12</sup>

During the eight seasons the calliope was with the Christy Bros. Circus, it was involved in a number of interesting incidents. Melodies from the calliope were broadcast over the radio on March 1, 1926, one of the first such events on record. That same year, on September 10 at Gadsen, Alabama, a storm caused a high voltage line to fall on the ground in the vicinity of the calliope and several Christy tableaux, killing or stunning the horse teams attached to them. The calliope player, Fletcher Smith, avoided injury by

unknowingly positioning himself on wood supports inside the calliope to escape the heavy rain which accompanied the storm. In mid-1928, the calliope, presumably meaning the boiler, was overhauled in the Union Pacific Railroad shops at Evanston, Wyoming.<sup>13</sup>

Christy Bros. was an early victim of the depression, closing at Greeley, Colorado on July 7, 1930. It returned to South Houston, Texas winter quarters where it was stored until early 1935. That year Jess Adkins (1886-1940) and Zack Terrell (1879-1954), two experienced circus men, pooled their resources and launched the new Cole Bros. Circus. They bought the Christy property, along with parts of two other traveling troupes and sent them north to their Rochester, Indiana winter quarters for fitting up. In the document describing the Christy property for sale, the calliope was listed as "STEAM CALLIOPE/Think it is 32 whistle, with boiler [,] keyboard, complete to play, nicely carved wagon, and screw brakes."<sup>14</sup> The steam calliope went out in 1935 pretty much as received, except for a coat of paint and the Cole-assigned number of 116. It further served on the Cole show in 1936 and 1937, carrying the number 66. In 1938 it traveled on Adkins and Terrell's second show, Robbins Bros., tagged as number 31.

The provenance of the instrument in the wagon in the 1930s is uncertain. In a January 18, 1938 letter to Adkins, Nichol successor J. M. Van Splunter recalled that in late 1935 and early 1936 they had corresponded regarding the steam calliope used with the 1935 Cole show. From later documents, we know the instrument was sent back to the Rochester winter quarters in mid-season. The show had been reduced in size by five cars after July 27, but the steam calliope wagon had remained on tour with the show. Van Splunter had inquired about buying the instrument and was informed by Adkins that most of it had been stolen.

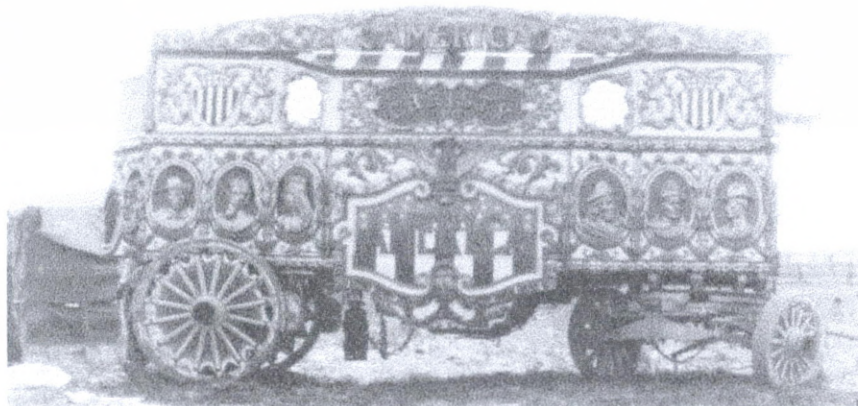
Ray Choisser, who played the Cole calliope daily from 1935 to 1939, gave three different stories about the instrument housed in the Christy wagon beginning in mid-1935. In an April 26, 1939 letter to calliope doyenne Alexander P. Clark, Choisser stated that he bought a calliope for the Cole show from the excursion steam-



boat *Homer Smith*, where he had played it from 1920 to 1922. Built in 1914 as a packet, the *Homer Smith* is a well-documented steamboat. It was remade into an excursion boat about 1916, renamed the *Greater Pittsburgh* in 1929 and then burned a total loss on March 8, 1931. Whether the calliope survived the fire to be sold to Choisser some four years later is doubtful. There is some similarity between the 32-whistle Nichol instruments of the *Smith* and Cole installations; however, a c.1920s photograph of the steam calliope on the *Homer Smith* clearly shows that it had several whistle and manifold details different from those on the Cole instrument. The base could have been changed between the 1920s and 1930s for a variety of reasons, but the bigger question is the veracity of Choisser's statement and the accuracy of the identification supplied to him by others.

Choisser wrote Clark twice in later years giving two other sources for the 1935 Cole instrument. In an October 22, 1946 note, Choisser stated that the calliope came from the excursion boat *Valley Belle*, which carried passengers between the Cincinnati wharf and Cincinnati's Coney Island. Per Choisser, she was thereafter sold to Pittsburgh interests which made her into a packet and renamed her the (*Steel City*) *Queen*, an observation which does not agree with known facts. The real *Valley Belle*, an 1883 packet, was bought by floating theater owner Capt. Billy Bryant in 1919. The acquisition probably marked the date she was fitted with a calliope. Bryant sold her for general towing services in 1939. Her calliope stayed with the Bryants and is now in the River Museum at Marietta, Ohio.

Less than three months later, Choisser wrote Clark on January 3, 1947 and indicated that a 20-whistle calliope from Christy was in the Cole wagon in the beginning of 1935. He joined the show at Syracuse, New York (June 4) and brought on a 32-whistle calliope bought in Pittsburgh from the *Steel Queen*, which he described as a small pleasure boat. The exact identity of the *Steel (City) Queen* remains a mystery.<sup>15</sup> Choisser remembered that the 32-whistle machine was put into the wagon four



The America tableau on Christy Bros. in 1929. Pfening Archives.

days later at Buffalo, June 6 and 7, 1935, where a new boiler replaced the one condemned by the New York inspectors. He also confirmed that the 20-whistle calliope was shipped back to Rochester where all of the whistles were stolen and presumably sold for the scrap value of their brass and copper.<sup>16</sup>

George Christy did have access to two different 20-whistle calliopes but neither would seem to be candidates for placement in the rebuilt Patterson wagon before 1935. The timing is off in both cases. One machine came to him with the Golden Bros. Circus property he acquired in 1924. Though a new wagon was later built to house it, the 20-whistle machine is thought to have remained in Christy's possession until he sold it to Ken Maynard in January or February 1936. The second 20-whistle calliope became Christy's possession in May 1936, when he purchased the former King brothers' Cole Bros. Circus of 1930 with its ex-Gentry Bros. steamer. When it was sold to Karland Frischkorn in the mid-1940s it lacked the instrument, suggesting removal sometime between 1936 and c.1945. It would be a stretch to suggest that the Golden instrument went to Cole in 1935 and that Maynard then received a replacement instrument from the ex-Gentry wagon. The hypothesis becomes less viable with the existence of a photograph of the Maynard unit about to be loaded for California; an instrument with whistles on the manifold can clearly be seen in the wagon. At best, Choisser's dates for 1935 check

with the show's route for that season. The recollection of a calliope being shipped back to Rochester and having the parts stolen from it verifies the Van Splunter memo to Adkins.

An advertisement in the July 23, 1938 *Billboard* (page 67) solicited a steam calliope for the Robbins Bros. Circus. According to Choisser, Adkins and Terrell were then contemplating two circuses for 1939, each with a parade, and that the plans included putting a second steam calliope on the road. Choisser was then handling the steamer on the Robbins show and would have been the contact person for any instruments tendered to the circus. The poor results of the 1938 Cole tour killed the second calliope plan and limited the 1939 operation to a single circus.

With all due respect to Choisser, a recent study of calliope information suggests that the calliope which went into the Cole calliope wagon in 1935, and which is now in the America, came from the Ohio River steamboat *Queen City*. The circumstances and timing for a transfer from the boat to the 1935 Cole show are rational. Comparison of the physical characteristics of the two calliopes also agrees.<sup>17</sup> Even the various names offered by Choisser seem to connect with the boat, which operated out of the Pittsburgh area. The relocation of a river calliope to the circus was an old practice. A number of American Steam Music Company calliopes which were on packets in the 1850s and 1860s later served in circus applications from the 1870s to after the turn of the century.<sup>18</sup>

The *Queen City* was built in 1897 as a deluxe packet for high class service, spending most of the time in the Pittsburgh and Cincinnati trade.



She did intermittent excursion and Mardi Gras trip duty as early as 1903 and continued in dual service until her retirement in late 1933. Reports place a calliope on her in 1929, when she was bought by Pittsburgh industrialist and steamboat broker John W. Hubbard. The origin of her calliope is unknown; it could have been newly made by Nichol or acquired second hand from another river boat. A report places the calliope there in 1933, the last season of operation before the *Queen City* was converted to a wharf boat.<sup>19</sup>

In January 1934, the Carnegie Steel Company celebrated the shipping of its 100th tow of steel products down the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans with a special operation called the "Century Tow." Prior to the January 25 departure from Pittsburgh, the calliope from the *Queen City* was put on the roof of the steam towboat *I. Lamont Hughes*, which pushed the eleven barges of steel down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Detailed photographs of the installation on the *Hughes* clearly show a 32-whistle Nichol calliope identical to that in the later Cole calliope wagons. The calliope was brought back to the Pittsburgh area and was mounted on another Pittsburgh area towboat, the *R. J. Heslop*, to lead the steamboat centennial parade at Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, July 1 to 4, 1934.<sup>20</sup> The *Queen City* calliope likely sat in a Pittsburgh shop or warehouse catering to the river trade until it was acquired for the Cole show through the efforts of Ray Choisser in 1935.

The conclusion to be reached from this aggregation of observations is that perhaps as many as three different steam calliope instruments were used in the Forepaugh Fish/Gollmar/Patterson/Christy/Cole wagon. The first and third were 32-whistle Nichol pieces and the second may have been a 20-whistle unit of unknown make. The last of the three, which is believed to have served on



The new calliope wagon built for the 1939 Cole Bros. parade. Pfening Archives.

the steamboat *Queen City* from 1929 to 1933, and later on the towboats *I. Lamont Hughes* and *R. J. Heslop* in 1934, is the one which went into a new wagon in 1939 and eventually into the America in 1940.

The old Forepaugh-Fish calliope wagon, rebuilt by Christy forces in the early 1920s, must have been in wretched condition by the end of the 1938 tour. Alexander P. Clark later described it as having unmatched diameter wheels on both the front and the back and a Model T differential serving as the front gear kingpin. The rear springs were of different sizes, the two halves of the bolster plate did not match and the left front wheel was egg shaped.<sup>21</sup>

For the 1939 season the Cole shop, led by Fred Seymour (-1945/1946?), fabricated an entirely different wagon to carry the calliope. An old arena wagon from the Robbins Bros. or Christy Bros. show served as the basis for the vehicle, which was framed with steel members. The skyboards and other parts came from former Christy cage number 22. Carvings were cannibalized from an 1893 Ringling Bros. tableau cage (Ringling number 52) and the former Christy calliope wagon. The new calliope wagon was given the number 68. While presentable to the public, the new wagon had little artistic merit.

The parades of the 1939 Cole show

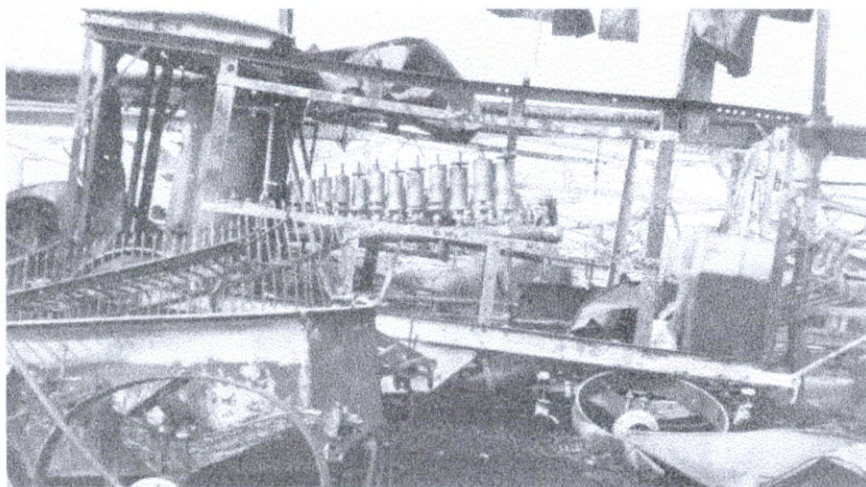
were the last daily circus street parades in America, and the new calliope was the final element in them. The remnants of the Christy wagon were abandoned in Rochester, Indiana, until they were acquired by Alex Clark for preservation in 1946. They remain in his possession at this time. There was no physical aspect of the 1939 Cole calliope which related to the 1903 Sullivan & Eagle-built calliope other than some relocated carvings.

The new calliope wagon rolled throughout the 1939 season, but was lost in the disastrous winter quarters fire at Rochester on February 20, 1940. Photographs taken after the conflagration reveal the calliope wagon's structural framework and iron. The instrument and boiler are clearly visible and appear to have survived relatively intact. The instrument was salvaged from the wreckage and shipped to Grand Rapids, Michigan, home of the General Devices and Fittings Company. This firm, owned by the reclusive and secretive John M. Van Splunter (1881-1957), had acquired the remnants of the Nichol firm in the early 1930s and proceeded to service the few remaining calliopes then in operation.

Former Nichol employees relocated from Cincinnati to Grand Rapids, enabling the specialized work to continue. Whistle bells which melted apart were soldered and possibly other parts replaced. A new wood housing was constructed for the keyboard, the former one being destroyed by the fire. Whether they are original or not, the calliope valves bear a cast-in-place date of 1902, and might have been installed by Van Splunter at this time. Though the scope of work undertaken by Van Splunter is unknown, the entire calliope was not ready by the season opener and it was several stands before steam music emanated from the rebuilt calliope.

Though he has been generally





The burned 1939 Cole calliope after the fire in Rochester. Pfening Archives.

regarded as a hard-boiled business man, Terrell did understand something about the nostalgic charm and appeal of the steam calliope. When someone else inquired about converting a steam calliope to compressed air in 1954, Van Splunter responded as follows: "A steam calliope can be operated by air all OK if you have the pressure and enough air. We figured it out for Cole Bros. about 15 years ago [1940, time of the fire], but it was too costly for compressor, engine or motor, and air storage tank when compared with steam boiler. Besides, Mr. Terrill (sic) of the Cole show said a steam calliope would not be the attraction in a parade or ballyhoo, when played by air, as he thought the steam shooting out of the whistles and smoke from the boiler was part of the spectacle. He did not want to use an oil burner on [the] boiler, because of almost no smoke. He wanted the smoke."<sup>22</sup>

Whether it was Terrell or Adkins who supported the retention of a steam calliope for the 1940 tour is unknown. Adkins passed away on June 25, 1940 and the calliope was dropped from the Cole line-up in 1941. One might assume that it was indeed the highly-regarded Adkins who pressed for it in 1940. The 1939 instrument was salvageable, but what was to be done to house and transport it? Taking a page from circus history, another wagon, the large Cole tableau commemorating the American continents, was

selected. Another case where a wagon was modified for steam calliope purposes was the band chariot of the Welsh Bros. Circus about 1902. The choice may have been guided by both the size and condition of the America tableau, as well as its thematic decorations. The show could just as well have adapted the sister tableau Asia, but it would have had less meaning for such an American creation as the calliope.

The modification of America to accept the steam calliope equipment was fairly extensive. The instrument itself was placed in the middle of the body, with the keyboard in the front. An access door was cut in the front panel to provide a crawl-in access for the operator. A large vertical, fire-tube boiler was placed in the rear of the wagon, with the fire-box door facing the rear. A coal bunker was installed to store the soft coal which fueled the boiler, with a small platform for the fireman. Water storage tanks with perhaps 100 gallon capacity must have been placed inside the wagon. The converted America became one of the most concealed calliope setups ever employed on a circus, with essentially all of the apparatus, the instrument and the player obscured from public view. It was also an uncomfortable configuration for players, who had to carefully climb into the wagon behind the team and then found themselves with no exit once inside. The big boiler totally blocked the rear doors of the wagon. Two barred openings were placed in each of the sides and the roof was opened to provide additional venti-

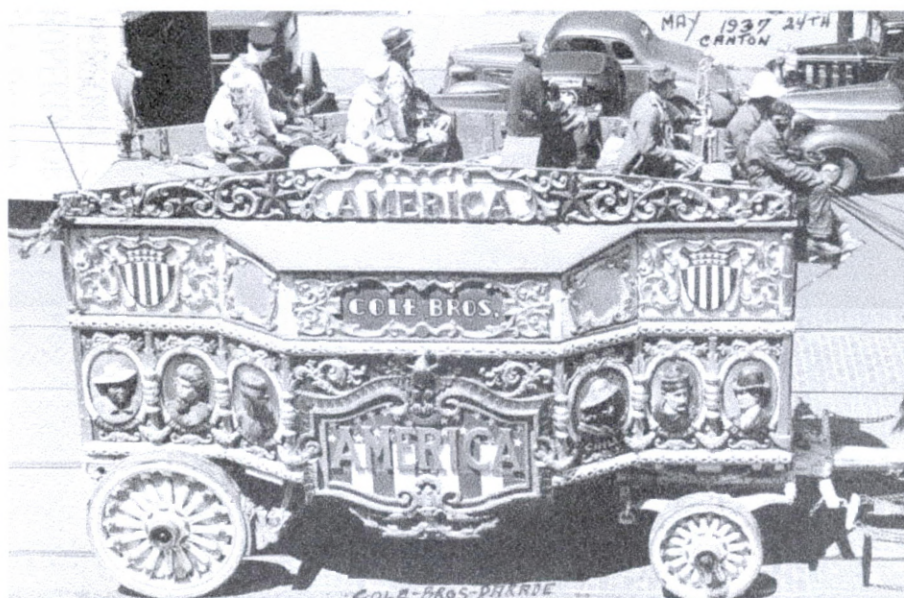
lation. Despite the various penetrations, one recent wagon occupant suggested that the temperature inside the America could reach 130 degrees on a hot summer day.<sup>23</sup>

The physical condition and musical capability of the instrument placed in the America is open to question. The late Richard E. Conover recalled that it was not in working order at the 1940 season's opener and stood on the lot unused, awaiting more attention. In an early 1947 letter to Alex Clark, Choisser noted "Did you tell me it was the one they are using on the [Cole] show [in 1946,] all out of tune [?] Should be after going thru (sic) fire." Presumably nostalgia, and not musical perfection, was the order of the day for the selections from the Cole calliope in the 1940s.

The playing pressure of the calliope is not recorded. In 1949, Tommy Comstock stated that it played best with 45 to 50 pounds per square inch (psi) pressure. Recently the boiler has been set to operate at 125 psi, with an in-line pressure reducing valve knocking it down to a manageable 40 psi. The mechanical linkage and valve design reduces the force necessary for the player to apply to the keys; however, the work to play it is still considerably greater than for any similar keyboard instrument.

The history of the America tableau commenced in 1903. It was one of the 13 extravagant wagons produced by the collaborative efforts of the Sebastian Wagon Company and the carving shop of Samuel Robb (1851-1928), both New York City concerns, for the return of the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth from Europe.<sup>24</sup> Four of the wagons were telescoping tableaus which commemorated the continents of Africa, America, Asia and Europe. The bottom level of each tableau featured a large title board, flanked on the sides, front and rear by bas relief portraiture representing the various nations or nationalities of the continents portrayed. Elevated from the lower body by means of a screw jack system was an allegorical grouping copied from the Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens, London, England. The one for America included a figure representing Liberty or Civilization astride an American bison.





America was utilized in Barnum & Bailey parades of 1903 and 1904 and was then stored at the Bridgeport, Connecticut winter quarters during a parade hiatus which lasted from 1905 through 1907. The wagon was then returned to service until the final year of independent operation, 1918. For the 1917 season the continent tableaux were modified, with the elevated statuary and elevating hardware being removed and the wagon body extended upwards, creating a full height storage area. Additional carvings and skyboards from an unknown source were applied in a rather effective and artistic manner. Photographs confirm the extension of all but Africa; however, other views do show the four allegorical groupings on their own gearing, suggesting the alteration of all four tableaux. In extended form the four wagons continued to serve on Barnum & Bailey through 1918 and on the merged operation, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows, in 1919 and 1920.

Following storage at the Bridgeport winter quarters for the next five years, the America was one of approximately thirty wagons which were sold for a paltry \$3,600 by the Ringlings to George W. Christy on December 31, 1925.<sup>25</sup> America and Asia were among those selected for immediate use and were shipped to Christy's South Houston, Texas quarters for fitting up for the 1926 tour. America toured with

The beautifully painted America tableau on Cole Bros. in 1937. Pfening Archives.

the Christy show until the end came in mid-1930, when the property was shipped back to the show's Texas winter quarters.

Christy's single opportunity to sell his stored Christy Bros. Circus came in early 1935 with the advent of Adkins' and Terrell's new Cole show. In the listing of Christy assets, America was described under the section headed "Tableaux" as follows: "America/Eighteen foot. Mass of carvings very flashy. Formerly Ringling Brothers. Our standard gear pole brake coupler." The description for its sister, the Asia tableau, stated "All sills are semi-steel [,] that is an angle iron bound along wooden sills." No doubt both ex-Barnum & Bailey wagons were reinforced as described.<sup>26</sup> America was utilized on the Cole Bros. Circus as a tableau during the years 1935 to 1938, also appearing in the daily street parade for the first three of those seasons. Each year it was redecorated in a slightly different polychromatic paint scheme as had been the case on Christy. Before the 1937 tour the carved eagles, which were positioned between adjacent nationality reliefs, were replaced with cylindrical turnings.

The Cole show departed from Rochester for the last time in the spring of 1940. Midway through the season Terrell offered to sell the

America calliope to circus memorabilia dealer Plumber M. McClintock for \$1,000 cash, an indication of the circus' financial straits. Terrell's offer may have also been contingent on his knowledge he would not use the calliope the next season. McClintock scrawled "worth about \$175" on Terrell's letter and filed it for posterity.<sup>27</sup> The America remained stored in Marion, Indiana during the 1941 season and was then relocated to the show's new Louisville, Kentucky winter quarters in early 1942.<sup>28</sup> It remained stored in Louisville until it was rebuilt for the season of 1946. The sunburst wheels were replaced by a set of wheels with solid rubber tires, like those commonly used on commercial trucks and carnival wagons. The wood doors on the rear were replaced with a pair of fabricated metal. A new paint scheme was applied, featuring a white body color augmented with red and blue. With various changes, this was the decorative scheme applied to the wagon during the years 1946 to 1950.

In 1946 the America became the last steam calliope to be carried by a railroad tent circus. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey had carried the former Sells-Floto Two Jesters steam calliope through 1945 for spectacle purposes. From 1946 until 1950 the America, pulled by either a six or eight-horse hitch of Percherons, was drawn through the streets of the city in which the Cole show was appearing. The appearance of the lone calliope on metropolitan streets was pure nostalgia and brought great publicity to the circus. To have it ready to tour streets before the matinee, the calliope was fired up while still loaded on the train. The calliope was also used to give concerts on the lot at noon time, a scheduled event which was advertised to the public by specially printed posters in 1947. At one 1948 engagement, the old standard *You Can't Be True Dear* was played.<sup>29</sup>

By this time the ornately carved skyboard added in 1917 was gone, replaced by one painted with the show's title. To underscore the



show's arrival, a small signboard reading "Here Today" was erected over the skyboard. The "America" title re-mained intact on the skyboard for the 1946 season but was replaced by "Cole Bros. Circus" during subsequent years.

The America and its hitch appeared in the Wisconsin circus centennial commemorative parade which wound through the streets of Delavan, Wisconsin on July 21, 1948. The event was the last street parade staged by a railroad tent circus which utilized parade wagons with wood-carved decorations. The march's elements included the Columbia bandwagon, the Mother Goose and the Old Woman in the Shoe pony floats, cage wagons, several other features and the America calliope in the traditional last position.

Zack Terrell sold the Cole show to Jack Tavlin and others in late 1948. The 1949 season was a loser and Terrell was brought back by the new owners late in the year to reorganize the operation. The brightest spot in the entire year occurred before the season started, when Cole show press agent F. Beverly Kelley (1905-1984) scored a major hit by placing the America and an eight-horse hitch in the January 20, 1949 Truman inaugural parade. The calliope was formally entered as a representative of the state of Kentucky, residence of incoming Vice President Alben W. Barkley.<sup>30</sup> Kelley's efforts were aided by Washington, D. C. attorney and circus fan Melvin D. Hildreth (1890?-1959), who happened to be Chairman of the Truman Inaugural Committee, along with Kentucky State Treasurer Edward Seiler, who Kelley credited with originating the idea. In typical circus fashion, the America and her team of eight white horses brought up the rear of the parade. A photograph of the entry went out over the wire services and brought much attention to the event. The Cole name was readily visible on the skyboard after concealing bunting had fallen away, accidentally, according to Kelley.<sup>31</sup>

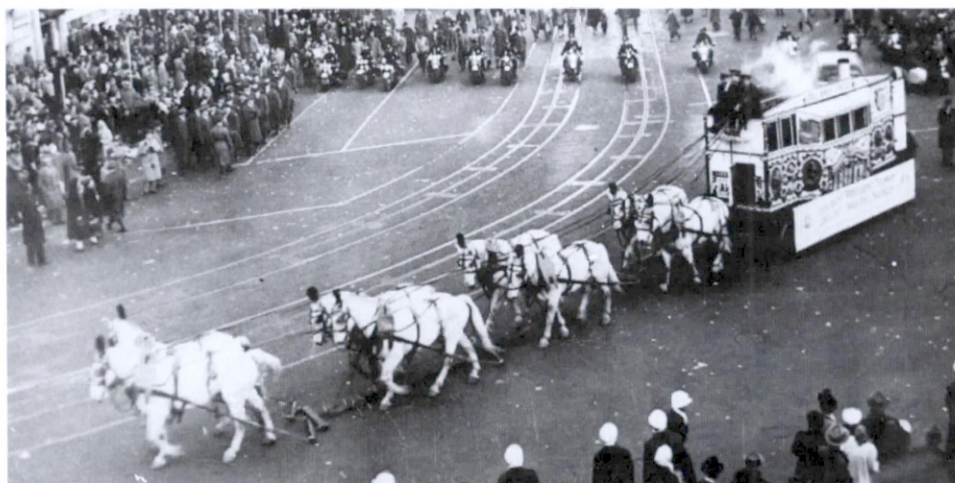
To the chagrin of victorious Democrats in the area, player Tommy Comstock frequently belted-out *I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover*, one of his personal favorites but a song which had been a tune associated with Robert A. Taft, a prominent Republican. When the calliope passed the Capitol, Comstock put out a rendition of *The Marine Hymn*. The Trumans and Barkleys were treated to short choruses of *Missouri Waltz* and *My Old Kentucky Home* in honor of their respective home states as the calliope passed the nearly deserted reviewing stand. In front of the White House, Comstock played *When You and I Were Young Maggie*, saluting the daughter of President Truman. The limited steaming capacity of the boiler caused Comstock to ration the music along the route. Keeping the boiler filled with water also proved to be a chore, with bucket brigades being established from several different District establishments. Comstock admitted that he was a nervous wreck the day before the procession, but appears to have done a fine job on the important day from all accounts.<sup>32</sup>

Tavlin found a buyer for the Cole circus in Arthur Wirtz, the head of the Chicago Stadium and other enterprises. The equipment passed into his new corporation, the Otis Circus Corporation, on January 6, 1950. One final change was made to the America for 1950. The barred

The Cole Bros. America steamer in the 1949 parade in Washington, D.C. Pfening Archives.

side openings were modified by the installation of panels into which openings shaped like a pair of crossed dumbbells were cut. Despite Wirtz's experience, a hybrid indoor/outdoor season, and the addition of Hopalong Cassidy, the 1950 season proved to be the last one for the venerable Cole Bros. Circus. It closed at Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania on August 5, marking the last date a steam calliope appeared with a railroad tent circus. The Cole train was sent to Peru, Indiana, where it was unloaded for the last time.

Following a weak attempt at motorized indoor operations in 1951, the decision was made in early 1952 to dispose of all of the rail show equipment. It was sold piecemeal, some going to scrap yards, others to private parties and much being abandoned on the former Terrell Jacobs winter quarters site in Peru where it had been unloaded and stored. The America remained at the Peru location until March 8, 1952 when the Cleaver-Brooks Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin took possession of it. A boiler making firm, Cleaver-Brooks had conducted a four-year search for a representative piece of Americana which used steam. Their knowledge of the America was brought about by circus enthusiast C. P. Fox of Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. Fred W. Hainer, Cleaver-Brooks Vice President, paid \$2,500 for the America and two ex-Barnum & London pony floats from the 1880s. Hainer, something of a musical instrument aficionado, already owned a Tangley air calliope at the time of the America's purchase.<sup>33</sup>



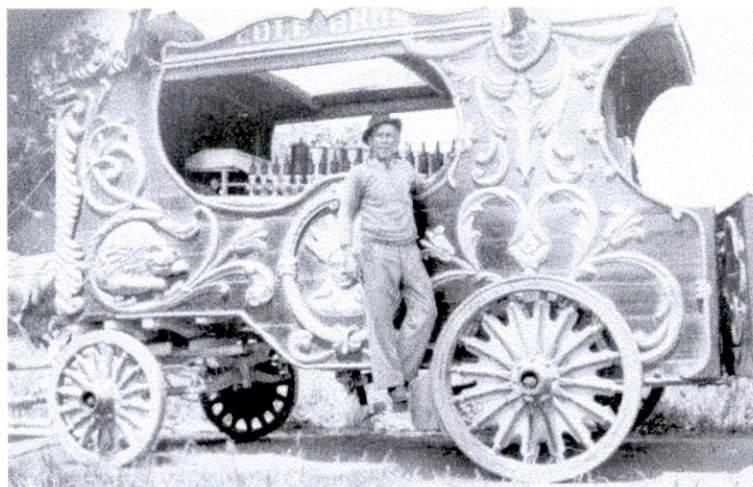


Cleaver-Brooks proceeded to substantially alter the America. They removed the coal burning boiler from the rear of the wagon, installing one of their own oil-fired, horizontal-tubed boilers in the front, over the gearing. A large water tank was positioned under the instrument, which was repositioned to be near the middle of the wagon, with the keyboard facing the rear doors. An electrical generator and fuel oil reservoir were also added, significantly increasing America's weight. Substantial structural modifications to the under frame and under-gears were made at this time. Indeed, it appears the Cole frame and gearing were entirely replaced by Cleaver-Brooks. The original front panel was removed and discarded, replaced by metal construction, part of which could be removed for boiler servicing.

The first appearance of the rebuilt America was at the Wisconsin State Fair during its August 16 to 24, 1952 run. It was positioned near the *Milwaukee Journal* facility, near the park's main office. Concerts were played on it several times each day. A booklet about the history of the America was printed, along with a recording of the instrument. After the fair, the firm slated the calliope to be used at other public events during the year.<sup>34</sup>

Following several years of intermittent use, the America departed from Milwaukee for its new permanent home, the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, on December 1, 1958. It was the first steam calliope to be acquired by a publicly-owned museum, and the second to be owned by any museum. The America was a feature of the Museum's first season, opening on July 1, 1959.<sup>35</sup>

From 1959 through about 1970 the America was utilized for daily concerts on the grounds of CWM. Following the 1970 acquisition of the so-called Somers steam calliope, the duties of the America were reduced to the annual appearance in Milwaukee for the Old Milwaukee Days and Great Circus Parade activities,



Ray Choisser on Cole Bros. Circus in 1936. Pfening Archives.

and other special events. Until it was withdrawn from daily Museum service, it was the only vintage circus steam calliope which could regularly be seen and heard by the American public. A major restoration of the America, including a restoration to the 1940 decorative scheme, will take place during the winter of 1997-1998.

### The Players

The fame of those who played an instrument often becomes a part of its glory and heritage. In the case of the instrument now in the America, a number of notable steam calliope players and other musicians have placed their hands upon its keys or preceding instruments which are part of its heritage. For the 1903 debut, no less a player than the famous Williamson Williams "Bud" Horn, the "Calliope King," was hired by the Luella Forepaugh-Fish show to preside at the keyboard. Horn (1850-1908) held sway as the top man in the field from the late 1870s until his death. During his career he played for all the major circuses, moving from one to another, commissioning the newest and best instruments from the builders.

The best known of the Gollmar-era players was Adrian D. Sharpe, a short-time circus man who lived long enough to write about his experiences on the 1905 show over sixty years later. He earned \$8.00 per week for the playing and selling of tickets.<sup>36</sup> Other Gollmar instrumentalists include H. L. Burt (1910), Pop Burt Smith (1911), Raleigh Wilson

(1912) and Al Berg (1913).

The colorful Fletcher Stevens Smith (1869-1944), circus press agent and sometime calliope player, played the calliope for Christy Bros. intermittently through the 1920s. An affable tobacco chewing fellow, some said about the only song he could render was *Red Wing*. Another player during the Christy years

was Clarence [Lee?] "Kidd" Cottmann, one of the very few African-American calliopists. In addition to his playing the steamer on Christy's second show, Lee Bros. in 1925 and 1926, he presided at the keyboard of the calliope on Christy Bros. in 1927 and 1928.<sup>37</sup> Cottmann repaired and undoubtedly operated the instruments for the namesake Christy Bros. outfit during his 1924 to 1928 tenure with Christy. Cottmann was likely the person to have played the Christy calliope on radio in 1926.

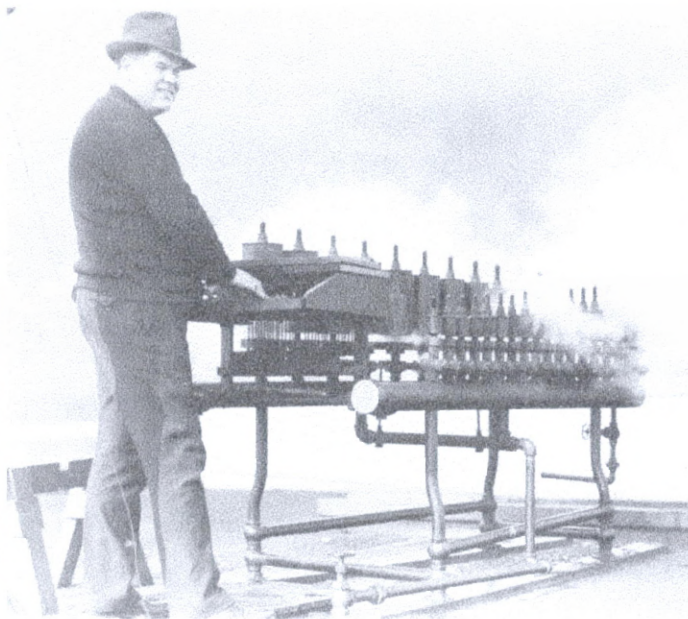
The inimitable Kenilworth La-Choisser (1895/1898?-1947), better known as Ray Choisser (pronounced coy-zer) and self-proclaimed as "Crazy Ray, The Calliope Maniac," handled the steamer duties on Cole 1935-1937, Robbins Bros. in 1938 and with Cole again in 1939. Choisser was not mentally unstable; it just happened that he was working at a state asylum when Ben Wallace hired him for his first calliope job. Choisser cut what is believed to be the second commercially produced record of a steam calliope, documenting his operation of the Cole calliope for the Gennett label of Richmond, Indiana. The tunes recorded on their disk #1201 sometime before August 1936 included such sentimental favorites as *Annie Laurie*, *Old Black Joe*, *Home on the Range* and *My Old Kentucky Home*. A slight portrayal of Ray's work is also on Gennett #1312, a later recording of the parade of May 13, 1937, when the Cole show played Richmond. Choisser's career, which included playing calliope on excursion steamboats and floating



theaters, and with carnivals and circuses, spanned from 1910 to his death. By 1917 he acknowledged to one prospective employer that his hearing was no good, for reasons which are obvious.

Players of the calliope on the packet/excursion boat *Queen City* included George Strother (1883-1973). He is remembered as having been a very good musician who generally served on the excursion boat *Homer Smith*. Long-time player and one-time Nichol employee Homer Denney (1885-1975) put in a guest appearance on the *Queen City* instrument in 1929 where he played his sentimental favorite *Good Bye Little Girl, Goodbye*. Denney held sway as the top river boat player in the Cincinnati area, regularly presiding on the multiple boats which made several round trips daily between the Cincinnati wharf and Coney Island between 1901 and 1947. Clarence W. Elder (-1965), an excursion boat musician, did some of the most difficult calliope playing ever attempted on the *I. Lamont Hughes* for the Carnegie Steel Company's Century Tow in 1934. He pounded out *In the Good Old Summer Time* as the towboat went from Pittsburgh to New Orleans in winter weather. Later he claimed that he wore cotton gloves and poured oil over the keys to keep them working as the steam froze to ice on the keyboard.<sup>38</sup>

Vern[on?] R. "Tommy" Comstock (1893?-1961) was the best known of the players of the America in the 1940s. He may have presided at the Cole keyboard as early as 1939 and as late as 1948 and was the player during the 1949 Truman inaugural parade. Shortly before he passed away, Comstock was negotiating with then CWM Director C. P. Fox in an ill-fated attempt to come to Baraboo to play the America in 1962.<sup>39</sup> Comstock's style had an impact on Herbert Head, a young Detroit, Michigan circus devotee who observed and learned from Comstock's playing, carrying his cir-



Clarence W. Elder at the keyboard of the steam calliope on the *I. Lamont Hughes*. Author's collection.

cus-style playing into contemporary times. Head has played the America in every street parade staged by CWM since 1963.

Other players who have sat at the keyboard of the calliope in the America include Kenny Woodward (1949, Cole Bros.) and Jack Crippen (1950, Cole Bros.). Cleaver-Brooks employee Ray Westphal may have served as player when the America was owned by the Milwaukee boiler maker. Former Christy Bros. Circus bandsman Harry Shell (1903?-1987) played the America at Baraboo for a very brief period about 1960. Miss Ethel (Mrs. Louis Romelfanger, later Mrs. Paul Luckey) played the calliope for many of the years when it was presented at CWM, sometimes as frequently as every half hour.

The most notable musician to have tackled the difficult keyboard of the America is jazz legend Duke Ellington (1899-1974). Brought to Milwaukee by the Schlitz Brewing Company in 1966 as part of its concert series, Ellington visited the Old Milwaukee Days show grounds on July 1, where his steam piano playing was documented for the record. Ellington was attracted by the novelty of the instrument, as other members of the public have been

drawn by its overtly loud charm.<sup>40</sup>

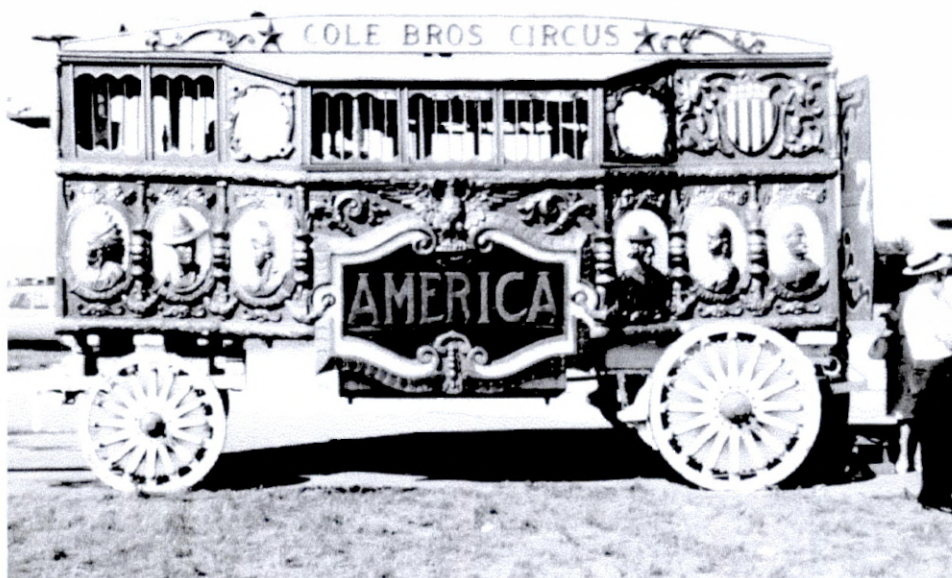
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#### Notes

1. John M. Kelley Papers, CWM; the 1908 Barnum & Bailey Loading Memorandum is at the Milner Library, Special Collections, Illinois State University, Bloomington, Illinois; other Barnum & Bailey inventories are in the Ringling estate inventories, copies of which are in CWM.
2. *Billboard*, February 20, 1926, p. 64; March 13, 1926, p. 62.
3. *Ibid.*, November-December 1996, p. 51.
4. *Ibid.*, May-June 1965, p. 13.
5. The first wild west outfit to have a steam calliope was the Pawnee Bill's Wild West of 1898, which is thought to have acquired a second-hand circus steamer.
6. The Sullivan & Eagle attribution is confirmed in *Billboard*, April 4, 1903, p. 5.
7. Letter from Gordon W. Lillie to William P. Hall, September 28, 1907, William P. Hall Papers, CWM; *New York Clipper*, February 14, 1903, p. 1143.





8. Letter from Thos. J. Nichol & Company to Ringling Bros. Circus, November 16, 1912, Fred D. Pfening III Collection.

9. Letter from Adrian D. Sharpe, who played the calliope in 1905, to Fred Dahlinger, 1969; 1907 Gollmar Bros. advertisement, CWM.

10. *Janesville (Wisconsin) Recorder & Times*, August 6, 1903.

11. 1906 Gollmar Bros. Ledger, p. 6, "One Calliope—fine-carved & gilded—with 32 whistles, #45-[\$1,000.]."; 1906 Gollmar newspaper advertisements, CWM.

12. *Billboard*, November 18, 1922, p. 72. *Ibid.*, February 3, 1923, p. 74, specifies the wagon length as 18 feet. Later Cole show information placed the reduced length at 15 feet.

13. *Billboard*, March 13, 1926, p. 64; September 18, 1926, p. 58; August 25, 1934, pp. 37-38; August 11, 1928, p. 55.

14. *Bandwagon*, May-June 1965, p. 13.

15. It may have been a boat which went through a succession of names as follows; *Virginia Steel City* (1912-1916); *East St. Louis*, *Island Belle*, *Greater New Orleans*. She was dismantled in 1929. River legend puts the calliope from the *Island Belle* on the new *Island Queen* of 1925, where it served until destroyed in 1947.

16. Copies of the Choisser-Clark correspondence are in the Thomas P. Parkinson Papers, CWM.

17. Peculiarities of the instrument include the pointed top whistle stems, and the bent legs with bulbous pipe fittings on the manifold support piping. The support was replaced after the 1940 fire, either by Van Splunter or

The America at the Schiitz parade in Milwaukee in 1964. Pfening Archives.

Cleaver-Brooks, with straight steel pipe.

18. See Fred Dahlinger, "The Origin of Early Circus Calliope Instruments," *Bandwagon*, July-August 1981, pp. 18-19.

19. *Waterways Journal*, July 20, 1929, p. 22; July 4, 1953, p. 34, in a flashback to the July 1, 1933 issue.

20. *Ibid.*, January 27, 1934, pp. 4, 6; February 3, 1934, p. 7; November 22, 1969, p. 10.

21. Letter from Alex P. Clark to Robert L. Parkinson dated September 14, 1970, CWM Institutional Files.

22. Letter from J. M. Van Splunter to Harry Shell, May 12, 1954, Thomas P. Parkinson Papers, CWM.

23. "He'll work for a song," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 16, 1995.

24. This landmark order has been documented in detail in Fred Dahlinger, Jr., "The History of The Golden Age of Chivalry," *Bandwagon*, March-April 1997, pp. 24-31.

25. Further details of this transaction are in the Thomas P. Parkinson Papers at CWM. An analysis of the sale inventory by the writer can be found in *Bandwagon*, July-August 1996, p. 31.

26. *Bandwagon*, May-June 1965, p. 13.

27. Letter from Zack Terrell to P. M. McClintock dated August 6, 1940, Fred D. Pfening III Collection.

28. *Billboard*, February 14, 1942, p. 39.

29. *Ibid.*, April 27, 1946, p.; CWM poster CB2-N14-47-1/2-1; *Bandwagon*, November-December 1979, p. 13.

30. The only other steam calliope to appear in an inaugural parade was the Somers calliope, now also at CWM. With live young girls clinging to the niches at the corners, it was inserted by musical instrument collector Jim Wells of Fairfax, Virginia in the January 20, 1969 Nixon procession.

31. *Billboard*, December 11, 1948, p. 54; F. Beverly Kelley, *It Was Better Than Work*, Patrice Press, 1982, pp. 198-203; *Billboard*, February 5, 1949, p. 70; letter from F. Beverly Kelley to Tom Parkinson dated September 14, 1966, Thomas P. Parkinson Papers, CWM.

32. "Steam Calliope Will Blare Out 'Missouri Waltz' But Lacks Keys for 'I'm Just Wild About Harry,'" *Washington, (D.C.) Evening Star*, January 20, 1949.

33. Walter Wyrick, "Remember Circus Calliopes? One Has Haven in Plant Here," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 11, 1952; *Billboard*, March 22, 1952, p. 64.

34. *Billboard*, June 21, 1952, p. 60.

35. "Old Steam Calliope to Circus Museum," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 30, 1958. The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan acquired a steam calliope in 1929. That institution is owned and operated by a private foundation. The state-owned John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida did not obtain clear title to the former Sells-Floto/RBBB steam calliope until 1979, although it had been at the facility since 1949.

36. Adrian D. Sharpe, "Day by Day With Gollmars 1905," *Bandwagon*, November-December 1968, pp. 16-22.

37. *Billboard*, March 21, 1925, p. 81; March 12, 1927, p. 66; March 17, 1928, p. 64.

38. *Waterways Journal*, July 20, 1929, p. 22; *S & D Reflector*, September 1967, p. 7.

39. Letters between Comstock and Fox are in the CWM institutional files.

40. *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 2, 1966; Duke Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1973, p. 490; C. P. Fox, *America's Great Circus Parade*, Reiman Publications, 1993, pp. 76-79. Alicia Armstrong, "Full Steam Ahead: Reporter Tries Hand at Playing Circus Calliope," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 24, 1973.



# THE GREAT ROMAN HIPPODROME OF 1874

## P. T. Barnum's "Crowning Effort"

By William L. Slout

It was the morning of April 25, 1874. A grand parade, made up of valuable stock forwarded by P. T. Barnum from Europe hit the streets of New York City. The procession was promoting the opening of P. T. Barnum's New Roman Hippodrome which the newspaper advertisements were touting as "The Event of 1874," occupying an entire block bounded by Madison and Fourth Avenues and 26th and 27th Streets, "at an expense of nearly one million dollars"—the largest collection of living wild animals in the world, along with *The Congress of Nations* described as "the most magnificent and dazzling spectacle ever witnessed in this country."<sup>1</sup> Amazing, most of the puffery turned out to be the truth.

A Roman Hippodrome? Not a circus? How could this be, when P. T. Barnum's Great Museum, Men-

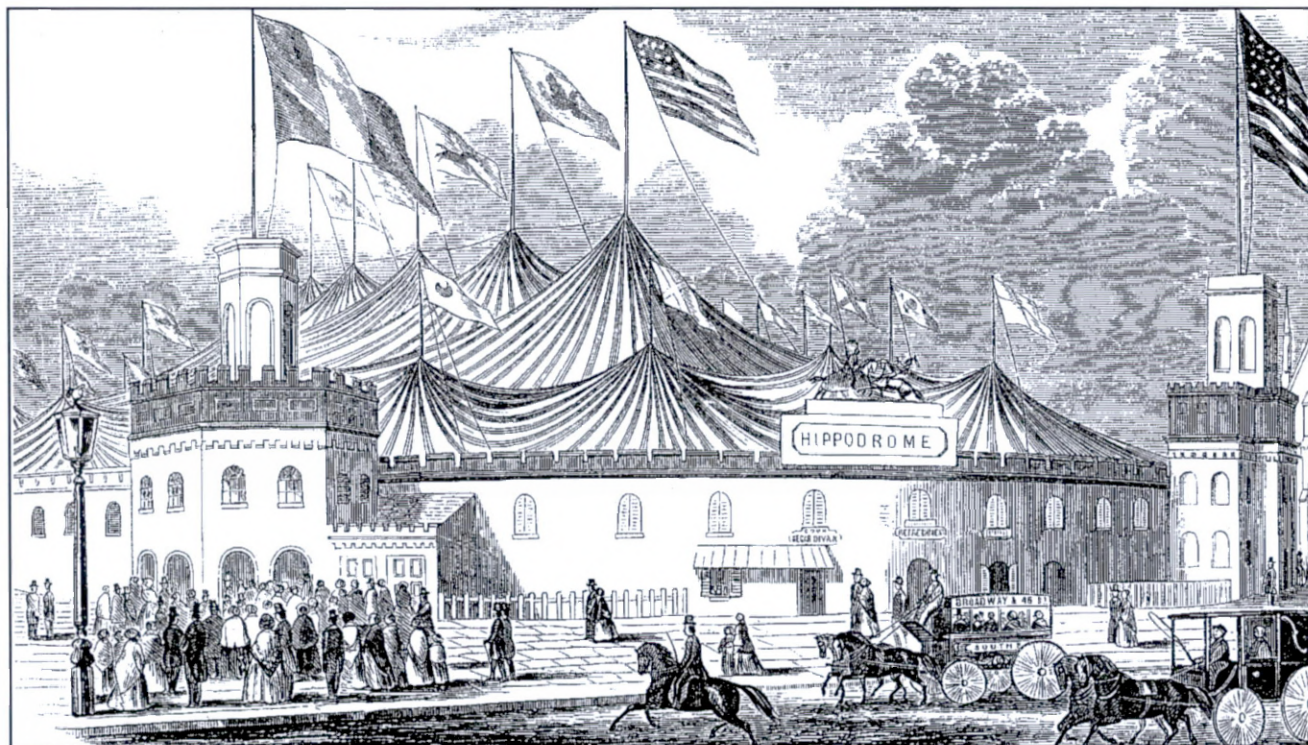
agerie, Hippodrome and Traveling World's Fair, which was indeed a circus, had just the year before fulfilled a record-breaking summer tour? Nevertheless, the attention of the Barnum organization was now focused on a "non-circus."

Since the Franconi Hippodrome was established in New York City in 1853, the use of the word "hippodrome" to describe a place of exhibition or form of entertainment appears on occasion in circus advertising; but there is nothing to suggest from this that any form of actual racing occurred around a hippodrome track. The Barnum show of 1873, with its two rings, was the first

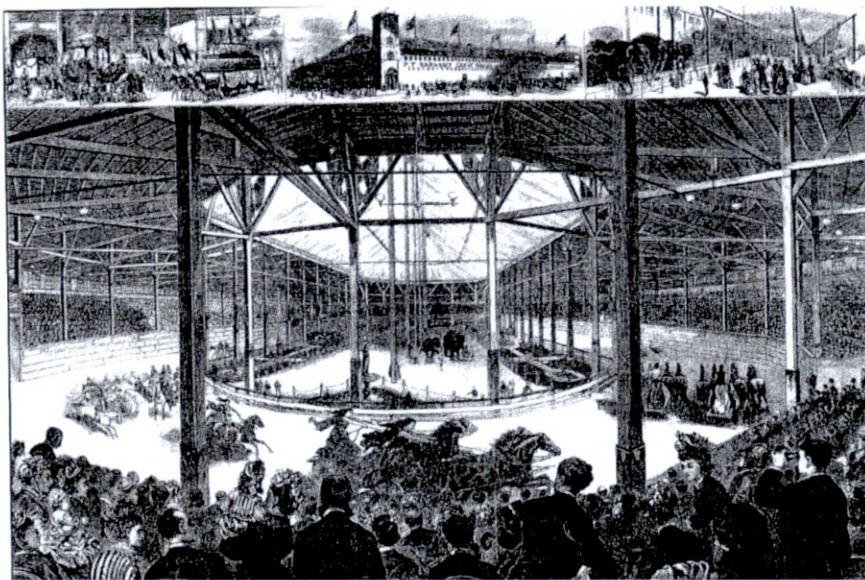
Barnum's Museum and Hippodrome at Madison Square in New York City as pictured in the *New York Daily Graphic*. Circus World Museum collection.

large enough to accommodate such a feature.<sup>2</sup> Yet there is nothing to suggest from the route book that it had any type of racing competition.

The idea for Barnum's New Roman Hippodrome must have been his own. In his autobiography he referred to a "long-cherished plan of exhibiting a Roman Hippodrome, Zoological Institute, Aquaria, and Museum of unsurpassing extent and magnificence." His propensity for "bigness," for topping his previous achievements, for a enjoyment of public acknowledgment, and, yes, because of the financial success of the 1873 tenting season, all supported the daring of such a scheme. In a letter to Gordon L. Ford, Barnum justified the move in the following manner: "I felt a great desire to do a *big thing* for the public & to make it quite unobjectionable to the most refined & moral. I think I have succeeded. It is my last







Inside the Roman Hippodrome as pictured in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* on May 9, 1874. Circus World Museum collection.

"crowning effort."<sup>3</sup> This, at the age sixty-three, was to be his final hurrah, elevating, free of all objectionable features and appealing to the patronage of the most moral and refined classes—the ultimate and lasting gemstone to adorn the Barnum public image.

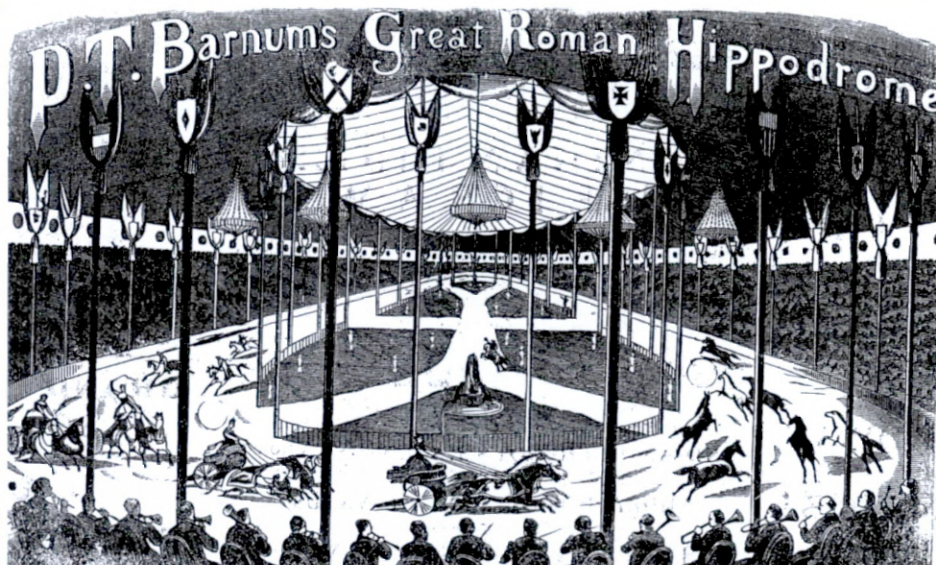
There is no indication how early in 1873 the plans for this last "crowning effort" were set in motion. We know that Barnum had arranged to make a visit to Europe in September to, as he stated in his autobiography, "run over and see the International Exhibition at Vienna."<sup>4</sup> But, whenever, the decision was made before he left the country.

After attending the fair and traveling to Berlin, the news was received from his representatives—W. C. Coup and S. H. Hurd—that the New York and Harlem Railroad Company property at Fourth Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street could be leased. The site was said to be the only vacant grounds in New York City large enough to accommodate the hippodrome he envisioned. It had been rented to various parties after the station was abandoned and the place deserted with the opening of Grand Central Station at 42nd Street in 1871. Barnum

immediately wired back the go-ahead for the property to be secured.

Meanwhile, he was fast at work in Europe. He claims to have visited all the zoological gardens, circuses, and public exhibitions wherever he went—the Hippodrome in Paris, the Circus Renz at Vienna, Myers' Circus at Dresden, Silamonski and Carré's Circus at Cologne, the Zoological Gardens at Hamburg, Amsterdam and other continental cities—thereby acquiring various novelties and valuable ideas. By November 18, he had purchased nearly a "ship load" of birds and animals at Hamburg. He then moved on

Another view of Barnum's Hippodrome as pictured in the 1874 printed program. Pfening Archives.



to England where on January 2 he contracted with John and George Sanger to purchase duplicates of the entire wardrobe and paraphernalia connected with the pageant of *The Congress of Monarchs* which had been exhibited at Agricultural Hall, London, four or five years before. For the sum of £33,000 he received the full list of chariots, costumes, trappings, flags, banners, etc.—£13,000 to be paid in advance, the remainder at the fulfillment of the terms of the contract.<sup>5</sup> This was confirmed by W. C. Coup in his *Sawdust and Spangles*. He stated that *The Congress of Monarchs* cost "Mr. Barnum and myself" over \$40,000.

The managerial staff for the Hippodrome company was much the same as the previous few years of circus operation. P. T. Barnum as the nominal proprietor was assisted by William C. Coup, Dan Castello, and Samuel H. Hurd. Coup was general manager and Castello "director of amusements." Hurd, Barnum's ex-son-in-law, was treasurer and in charge of looking out for Barnum's interest. Charles W. Fuller, a man of wide experience, was the general agent. David S. Thomas was the press agent.

James M. Nixon was acquired to assist Castello. This was a wise choice. Although Castello came into this with some years of experience as an equestrian director, his requisites for developing dramatic spectacle were far inferior to Nixon's. It appears to this writer that, although



Barnum supplied the grand scheme for the Roman Hippodrome, Nixon's hand at bringing it off was far more instrumental than he has heretofore been given credit.

The finished Hippodrome was a structure of some 400 by 200 feet (larger than a football field). The covering or canopy above the performing space, eighty feet in width, consisted of light waterproof canvas, manufactured for the purpose in the style of an Italian pavilion, with alternate stripes of rich and variegated colors. Six wooden spars one hundred feet in height were the main support of the flexible roof—each one, projecting through, was festooned with flags. The track itself was thirty-five feet wide at the ends and twenty-six at the sides, with a total circumference of one-fifth mile.<sup>6</sup>

As one passed through the main entrance on Madison Avenue, the whole length of the right side of the building, beneath the tiered seating, served as the menagerie—penned animals on the right of the passage and cages on the left. On the Twenty-Seventh Street corner was a large aquarium. The left side of the structure was occupied as stables for the ring stock.

The family circle, on the Twenty-Sixth Street side, was furnished with benches covered by carpeting; the gallery, on the Fourth Avenue side, with plain seating; the parquet, on the Twenty-Seventh Street side, with cane-bottom chairs; the orchestra section, extending nearly the full length of one side, with patent iron folding chairs. Four sumptuous private boxes, accommodating eight people each, were located near the Madison Avenue entrance. On the opposite side were "retiring rooms for ladies, supplied with all the necessary assistants for toilet arrangement."<sup>7</sup>

A large area in the center of the arena, surrounded by the hippodrome track, was enclosed with a light railing. A roadway was placed through it, branching at either end into two entrances. On both sides



P. T. Barnum as he looked around 1874. Pfening Archives.

of this were grassy plots supporting an abundance of flowers. At each end of the arena was a fountain of running water; and midway there was a music stand. And somewhere was located a pond where "graceful swans disport[ed] at ease." Between each post, suspended from the roof, were mechanical birds, made in Paris, which issued forth sweet chirping sounds as the audience was being ushered to their seats.<sup>8</sup> For lighting, there were chandeliers over this enclosure, augmented by two rows of gas lights around the track and seating area. The entrance through which the various processions and chariots entered to the scene of action, located at the easterly, or Fourth Avenue, end of the interior, was thirty feet high and twenty feet wide.

On April 27, as banners waved their welcome atop the canvas roof, the opening night patrons crowded their way into the huge structure to bear witness to this gala event; but they would not celebrate the presence of the star attraction—Barnum was still at sea, a few days shy of New York harbor.

The commentary in the New York *Herald* suggested that 15,000 New Yorkers created a crush never before seen at any public place of amusement in the city since the days of Ellen Tree or Fanny Ellsler at the old Park Theatre. The jam was so great, it stated, that the police were almost powerless—although at times exercised their clubs vigorously upon the hats and heads of the surging crowd—and a number of ladies fainted under the pressure of the pushing and shoving multitude.<sup>9</sup>

From newspaper accounts of the evening, we learn that the program opened with a brilliant pageant minutes in length, and bearing no relationship to the rest of the program. It took the place of the old-fashioned *grand entrée*. The long procession around the hippodrome track consisted of magnificent chariots and tableaux cars and long lines of court retainers and soldiers, mounted and on foot, in which many of the courts of Europe and the East were represented. The theme reflected a nineteenth century passion for world discovery—a curiosity about not only ancient cultures but of existing ones as well.

There is no doubt this spectacle was breathtaking to an 1874 audience or that it was the most luxurious show of pageantry ever attempted on this continent. It was repeatedly described by observers in such phrases as "huge gilded cars," "gorgeously mounted chariots," "splendidly caparisoned camels, elephants, horses, and ponies," and "hundreds of performers in elegant costumes." The elaborate procession would draw awe struck attention from audience and press during its New York run and, in the future, wherever the show was presented.

The *grand entrée* was supervised by a series of races and variety performances. There was flat racing between men mounted on English thoroughbreds; racing between men standing astride two horses; Roman two-horse chariots racing; English jockey racing; hurdle racing and, let us not fail to mention, elephant, monkey, and ostrich racing. There was also a liberty race between some twenty horses without riders or harness. At the end of



each of the races, the victor was handed a flag and then made a circle around the course to receive the approbation of the audience.

In between the races there were various specialty acts. They were introduced to the arena in an elegant barouche with a coachman and footman in livery and driven once around before performing. There was Mons. Loyal and Millson & Lazelle on a trapeze, Mons. Joignerey exhibiting feats of strength, and Signor Leonchi dressed as an Indian, demonstrating his skill with a lasso while mounted on horseback. A bit of satirical fun was offered when "Mme. Pompadour's Carriage in Central Park" was represented by a double turnout carrying a dozen dignified monkeys. There was also a comical race between a half-dozen such primates mounted on ponies. The program terminated with a female charioteer racing four horses abreast against a male counterpart.

April 30th marked the arrival from Liverpool of P. T. Barnum on the steamer *Scotia*. That night he attended his great dream for the first time. Once the audience became aware of his presence, they were energetic in calling him out. He then stepped into the barouche and, standing hat in hand, was driven around the arena to cheers of welcome and resounding applause. He termed that night "the greatest assemblage of people ever gathered in one building in New York." And added that his "enthusiastic reception was at once a testimonial of the public appreciation of one of [his] greatest efforts in [his] managerial career, and a verdict that it was a complete and gratifying success."<sup>10</sup>

After only a few weeks into the run, novelties were being added to the program. A sequence with Leonchi's Tribe of Indians and Mexican Rangers depicted various scenes of Indian life—preparing a camp on the plains, a buffalo hunt by six young chiefs, a Canadian snow shoe race, a hurdle race by six young braves on their ponies,

a hurdle foot race by twelve young men, a man racing against a horse, etc.

Added to the non-riding acts were Satsuma and Little All Right, who performed their Japanese ladder balancing act. Charles White entered a den of performing lions as the big cage was pulled around the oval by a four-horse team to allow vantage from the whole of the arena. Mlle. Victoria, whose last name is unknown to us, walked the wire and eventually crossed it on a velocipede.

In mid-July a satirical sequence called *Donnybrook Fair; or, The Lancaster Races* was added. The publicity explained it as "twenty minutes of drollery and rollicking fun interspersed with comical situations, ludicrous scenes and life-like portraits." This appears to be a series of clown acts still in keeping with the nature of the hippodromic program. Events included a greased pole com-

This Barnum advertisement appeared in the *Massachusetts Ploughman* on July 25, 1874. Pfening Archives.

petition, wheelbarrow, sack, and donkey races, and a sketch about the trading of horses. There were burlesque fist fights and melees amidst the wildest confusion, as the women urged on their favorite Irish fighters.<sup>11</sup> All this was a seeming burlesque, using a nineteenth century view of the Irish character. Attached to this was a segment—the Lancaster Races—that included an English steeple chase.

Beginning Friday, June 26, and continuing to the following Friday, the regular performances were supplemented by amateur athletic contests, with prizes announced to be bestowed to the winners. Contestants were restricted to men who had never performed for hire or had never been compensated for teaching the feat in which they were said to excel. The competitions included pole vaulting, rope climbing, tossing the caber (a roughly trimmed tree trunk used in Scottish sports), standing long jump, *battoute* leaping, weight lifting, pole climbing, a bayonet exercise, shot put, wrestling, high jump, foot boxing, hop-skip-and-jump, dumb bells, walking, and various foot races.<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of July it was announced that Barnum had arranged for twelve experimental balloon ascensions. For some time he had entertained an interest in navigational flight and more recently contemplated the launching of a transcontinental balloon from New York City, piloted by three aeronauts of different nationalities, for which he was prepared to expend any sum necessary to accomplish. Money was to be no object.<sup>13</sup>

Balloon navigation was an intriguing notion in the public mind. And there is no doubt that Barnum was serious about these experiments and fully intended to make a Barnum-like effort to conquer the problems of an Atlantic crossing. But it was also a shrewd move on his part to combine scientific study with show business

**BARNUM IN BOSTON!**



**THE GREAT  
ROMAN HIPPODROME!**

New running with such brilliant success to Crowded and Fashionable Audiences in New York City, will open in Boston for

**THREE WEEKS ONLY, - - MONDAY, AUGUST 3d,**  
Occupying four blocks on Back Bay, adjoining the Colosseum Grounds, **AFTERNOON and EVENING.**  
**One Thousand Men and Women. Six Hundred Arabian and American Horses.**

One Hundred English Thoroughbreds, the latter used specially for the great **HURDLE and PLAT RACES** by young and daring lady riders. **ROMAN CHARIOT RACES**, four horse chariots, with American drivers. The great spectacular pageant, **THE CONGRESS OF ELEPHANTS**, introducing the entire strength of the company, and reserved at every exhibition with unbounded enthusiasm.

**DONNYBROOK FAIR AND THE LANCASHIRE RACES.**  
**RARE AND COSTLY WILD ANIMALS ONLY!**

Rhinoceros weighing 9,500 lbs.; Living Giraffes; Sea Lions; Elephants, etc. etc. 2000 lbs. of transportation of over

**FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS**

Mr. Barnum will bring his entire combination to Boston during the interval required for the great Hippodrome building in New York, preparatory to the Winter Season.

**PROF. W. H. DONALDSON**  
Will give a grand  
**Experimental Balloon Ascension**  
Every Tuesday and Friday Afternoon from the interior of the Hippodrome.  
For particulars see small bills.

Mr. F. H. ADAMSON granted to all who purchase Mr. Barnum's Great Book, 900 pages, illustrated, written up to March, 1874. Reduced from \$3.50 to \$1.50.



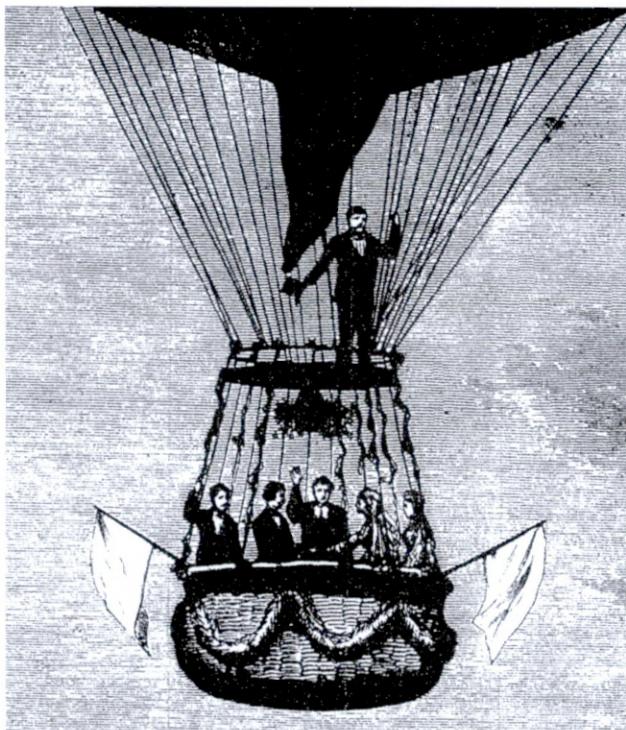
rewards. As it turned out, Prof. Washington Donaldson's lifts into space were remarkably instrumental in attracting audiences to the Hippodrome; and, indeed, became a feature nearly as important as the show inside the tent.

On July 7, the day set for the first ascension, the balloon was carefully inflated during the matinee performance, presumably on the infield of the Hippodrome. But, alas, once filled, it was discovered there was insufficient lifting power to allow a proper ascent to be made. So the following day the balloon was emptied and refilled with gas from another company, but not in time for the scheduled lift-off. Successful voyages occurred, however, on the following two days.

An effort was made to bolster attendance for the final two weeks of the season. Prices were lowered, allowing all events to be witnessed for only 50¢. In addition, since professional pedestrianism was experiencing a decade of popularity at this time, it was announced that Edward Mullen, a well known pedestrian, would attempt to walk around the Hippodrome oval for a distance of 500 miles within a six-day period. For this the box office would be open day and night, price 50¢.

Mullen's scheduled start was set at 12:05 a.m., July 20. An oval shaped track was positioned within the hippodrome course as an inner ring. This allowed for the walk to occur continually throughout the regular hippodromic program without interruption of any event. Representatives of the Committee of Arrangements were present at the site day and night to certify complete compliance with the rules of pedestrianism. Unfortunately, Mullen was forced to abandon the effort after the matinee on the 23rd because of swelling in one of his legs. He had sprained a tendon at an exhibition of his skills some two weeks earlier, from which, as he discovered, he had not fully recovered.

On Friday, July 24, Prof. Donald-



Prof. Donaldson making the "Grand Press Ascension." Circus World Museum collection.

son made what was advertised as a first "Grand Press Ascension" in the completed large balloon, *P. T. Barnum*, expressly constructed for experimental flight, to ascertain the existence of an easterly current. The craft was made of the best materials and under the supervision of Donaldson himself. The gas bag supported a strong but light wicker basket, eight feet long, five feet wide, and four feet high, large enough to accommodate six or more people, including reporters, and provisions for two days of airborne adventure, still leaving space for ballast, scientific instruments, and other necessities. The practice of balloon excursions for newspaper people would, within a year, end in disaster.

The inflation began at 8:00 a.m. and the ascent occurred at 4:15, just five minutes following the finish of the matinee. Accompanied by five or six representatives of the local press, the Professor and his flying machine arose from the Hippodrome infield and disappeared through an opening in the canvas roof. The large crowd which had gathered outside the building greeted the passengers with cheers of approval. Donaldson, posed

heroically, hat in hand, acknowledged the waving mass below. The balloon drifted, not east, but rapidly northward and within a matter of fifteen minutes or so was out of sight.

The Hippodrome season closed on August 1. The only novelty for the week was another pedestrian event. C. N. Payne "accepting Mr. Barnum's proffer for the free use of the walking course inside the inner enclosure of the Hippodrome," as the advertisement stated it,<sup>14</sup> appeared on Wednesday, July 29. At 9 o'clock that evening he commenced the feat of walking 115 miles in less than twenty-four hours. Starting off with his best time, he made the first mile

in ten minutes and twenty seconds. But, in the end, he failed to meet his goal; for at 9:04 p.m. on Thursday, exactly twenty-four hours from his starting time, he had traversed only sixty-seven and a half miles.

Following the Saturday performance, the obstinate ostriches were rounded up, all the trappings and costumes were packed, and the whole of the arenic spectacle loaded up and conveyed to Boston, where Barnum's Great Roman Hippodrome opened under canvas just two days later.

#### NOTES

1. *New York Times*, April 24, 1874, p. 7.
2. An exception to this took place indoors across the country in San Francisco, where, on the site of the old Mechanics Pavilion, John Wilson's Hippodrome was attracting audiences in 1865. The place was arranged with two rings, an inner and outer one. In the larger, all sorts of races were contested—hurdle, chariot, Roman, pony, and even running. The smaller ring was used for Ella Zoyara's principal act on horseback, for Painter and Durand's *la perche equipoise*, for exhibition of the trained colt, Othello, and for other gymnastic and acrobatic activities.



Several events were featured during the short season. A number of hose companies vied for championship of the mile run around the oval track. And pacing and trotting horse races were offered with purses amounting to \$100 and \$250. This venture was within a permanent structure and of a short life. The population of California at that time was not of sufficient numbers to support lengthy engagements. The first to use "Hippodrome" in the title of an American circus was Dan Rice in 1852-54, but there was no hippodrome track. Others were Levi J. North, June & Co., and Rufus Welch, 1853; H. C. Lee, 1854. The true originator was Victor Franconi in Paris, copied by Batty in London.

3. P. T. Barnum, *Selected Letters*, (New York) Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 181.

4. P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, (New York) Alfred A. Knop 1927, p. 690. On the other hand, in a letter to Joseph Henry sent from Bridgeport and dated September 19 [Barnum, *Selected Letters*, p. 177], Barnum indicated his European trip was to investigate the possibility of sending a balloon across the Atlantic. He claimed a long-time interest in aerial navigation and was at this time prepared to consult with authorities in England and France and to put up the money for such a flight. [New York Times, September 18, 1873, p. 5.] The bottom line being that a successful project of this nature could show profitable returns by merely exhibiting the balloon, not to mention the balloonist.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 691-696.

6. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, May 9, 1874, p. 139.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Robert James Loeffler, "A Re-Examination of the History of Madison Square Garden," Part One, *Bandwagon*, March-April, 1973, p. 8.

10. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, p. 698.

11. Barnum Advance Courier, 1875, p. 20. This edition, which is used as a source for this publication, is believed to be almost identical to the one issued in 1874.

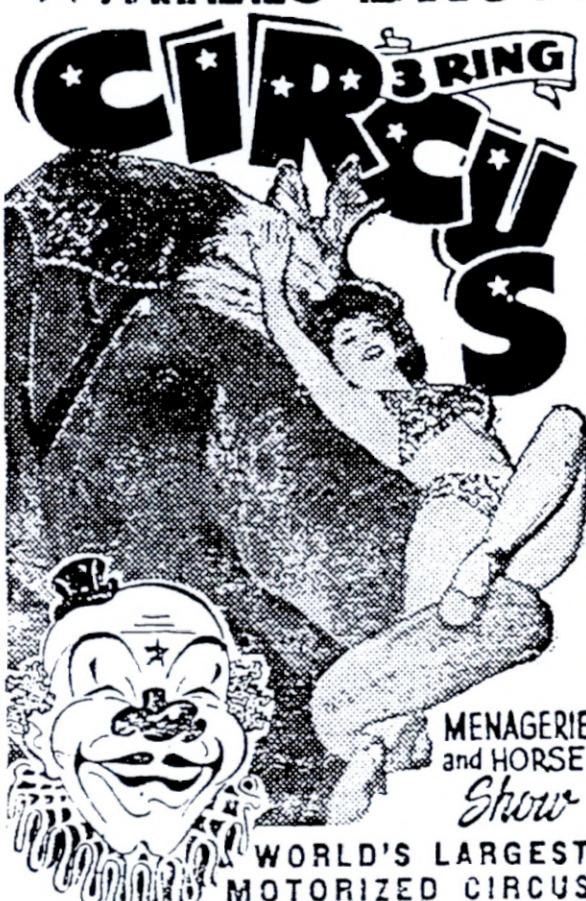
12. The contests were scheduled as follows: Friday, June 26—pole vaulting, rope climbing, mile race. Saturday, June 27—wheelbarrow race, tossing the caber, relief race, one-mile handicap race, standing long jump, one hundred yard dash, half-mile handicap. Monday, June 29—boy's race for under sixteen years of age, *battoute* leaping, rope climbing, half-mile walk, hand or health lift, half-mile run, pole climbing, bayonet exercise. Tuesday, June 30—100 yard race, shot put, three-legged race, 220 yards race, heavy hammer throw, wrestling, professional one mile walk. Wednesday, July 1—running high jump, wrestling, second trial, one-mile race, running long jump, hurdle race, 1/8 mile, eight hurdles three feet high. Thursday, July 2—quarter-mile race, *la savate*, foot boxing or a French style of self-defense, amateur one mile walk, hop-skip-and-jump, heavy single dumbbell, putting 100 pound dumbbell from shoulder, wrestling, final trial, hurdle race, 100 yards, four hurdles 3 feet high. New York *Clipper*, July 4, 1874, p. 111; July 11, 1874, p. 115.

13. New York Times, September 18, 1874, p. 5.

14. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1874, p. 7.

# ANNOUNCING! SUMMER OF 62

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FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE:

# MILLIE-CHRISTINE, THE AFRICAN TWINS

By Joanne Martell

Millie-Christine McKoy was a talented and popular nineteenth-century show-business performer who never let her strange Siamese-twin body slow her down. Born into slavery, joined together at the base of the spine, her resilient spirit carried her through kidnappings and exploitation. Her intelligence and good humor charmed audiences across the States from Maine to California, and abroad from England to Russia. (She never did get to Africa.) Against all odds, Millie-Christine became a remarkably successful woman who deserves to be remembered.

Woman? Women? How to speak of her? Was she one person or two? Monemia McKoy, the mother, always called Millie-Christine her baby, her child. Singular. Family called her Sister. Grand-nephew Fred McKoy said, "She was always Aunt Millie to me. She was the best, Christian-hearted person I ever saw. I often wish I could live the life she lived."

Most people outside the family saw Millie-Christine as two. "They had the nicest personalities," a neighbor recalled. "They were as pleasant and likeable as could be."

Millie-Christine's own perception? A history written at age sixteen said—"Although we speak of ourselves in the plural, we feel as but *one person*; in fact as such we have ever been regarded, although we bear the names Millie and Christina. . . . We have but *one heart*, one feeling in common, one desire, one purpose." They meant "one heart" emotionally. Physically, there were two hearts, and they beat at slightly different rates.

A slave midwife delivered the joined twins on a swampy farm near Whiteville, North Carolina in the fever-heat of July, 1851. Aunt Hannah estimated their combined weight at seventeen

pounds. The upper bodies were separate and distinct, then merged at the coccyx and fused into a single pelvis. There were four legs, and if you tickled the toes of one, both babies laughed.

Blacksmith Jabez McKay owned Millie-Christine's family. She was child number eight, or eight and nine, according to how you count.

"Our coming in such 'questionable shape,'" the twins said, "created as great a furor in the cabin as our appearance has since wherever we have been." However odd, they grew

Handbill used to advertise the McKoy twins at an early age. North Carolina Division of Archives and History.

and thrived, said their account, "just as well as the best developed young African on the premises."

When they were ten months old, McKay sold his remarkable twins to a show-business promoter for \$1,000 and 25% of exhibition profits. The Celebrated Carolina Twins appeared at North Carolina's first State Fair in 1853, age two. "Most visitors have expressed surprise," a Raleigh newspaper stated, "to find them so 'PERT' and 'CUNNING,' with such intelligent, happy faces, where they had not expected to see such interesting children."

Their early years held twists and turns, one adventure after another. Kidnapped in New Orleans. Trained by a detective. Not found. Briefly surfaced at Barnum's Museum in New York City, age three, now billed as The United African Twins.


On her fourth birthday Millie-Christine was at sea, aboard the sailing ship *Arab* out of Canada, bound for England. Dr. Lindfors published an account of their early British adventures, "The United African Twins on Tour: A Captivity Narrative," in the September 1988 issue of *South African Theatre Journal*.

The African Twins were a hit from Liverpool to Dundee. The promoters who had picked them up in Pennsylvania spun a colorful yarn to go with the show. The United African Twins, so they claimed, had been born in Tambo, Africa. ". . . little phenomenas, . . . natives of some country up the river Congo," one paper reported. When only a year old, according to the spiel, they were dragged off together with both their parents, and three brothers and two sisters, and sold into slavery at Cuba. Profits from the show would go to free the twins' family, her manager assured the ticket-buying public.

The Greatest Wonder of the Age!

**AFRICAN TWINS**

UNITED BY NATURE.



ACCOMPANIED BY THEIR

**MOTHER**

WHO HAS RECENTLY BEEN

LIBERATED FROM SLAVERY,

WILL HOLD THEIR

**DRAWING-ROOM LEVEES**

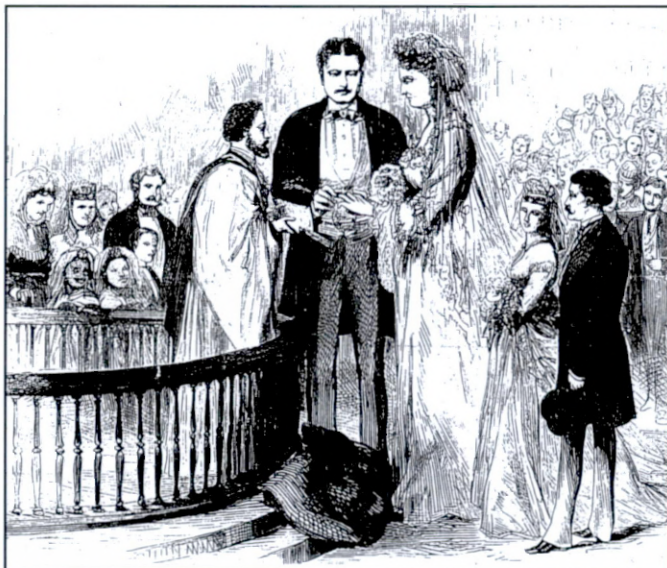


"These children are exceedingly intelligent for Africans," said the *Liverpool Courier*. "They speak English (Yankee version), and are very amusing in their manners." Examining doctors found them "interesting, lively, and intelligent little people."

An eminent London doctor, wonderfully named Dr. Martell Ramsbotham, noted: "The children stand not quite back to back, but rather sideways; so that they are able to place their arms around each other's neck, and give each other a kiss; but they cannot walk side by side. . . . They play together with their toys; they seldom have contrary wishes, and although there are at times little tiffs between them, they have never been known to have a downright quarrel. . . . They run about with amazing ease and activity. Their dispositions are both very amiable, though one is milder than the other in temper, the little one having the most 'pluck,' and their intelligence is equal to, if it does not exceed that of most European children of the same age." The doctor believed them to be five when he judged them bright for their age. Actually, they were precocious four-year-olds.

Meanwhile, back in the States, their legal owner, a South Carolinian named Joseph Pearson Smith, finally tracked them down after an ex-

This drawing of the Giant's Wedding appeared in the July 29, 1871 *Harper's Weekly*. Author's collection.



pensive two-year search. He took the twins' mother, Monemia, and sailed for England to reclaim her lost child. Smith and Monemia bided their time until they could give Millie-Christine's manager the slip. For a couple of weeks, Monemia joined the show. When they did slip away, Smith and Monemia sailed home with the twins on the luxury steamship *Atlantic*.

Joseph Smith toured his remarkable Carolina Twins through the deep South, teaching himself show business as they went along. The twins rode in the second New Orleans Mardi Gras parade in 1858, when they were six. A young river pilot, Sam Clemens, watched that parade: "I saw the procession of the Mystic Crew of

Comus . . . and in their train all manner of giants, dwarfs, monstrosities, and other diverting grotesquerie." The procession was "a startling and wonderful sort of show," he

remembered, "as it filed solemnly and silently down the street in the light of its smoking and flickering torches."

Millie-Christine belonged from birth to that special clan which outsiders called freaks—"giants, dwarfs, monstrosities and other diverting grotesquerie,"

LE  
**TROMBINOSCOPE**  
TOUCHATOUT

**MILLIE ET CHRISTINE**, négresses jumelles du même lit, nées, toutes deux, dans la Caroline du Nord, en 1851. — Ces deux sœurs ne sont point seulement jumelles, elles sont encore liées par un attachement... qui s'étend du bas des reins à la naissance des jambes. — Leur mère était une superbe négresse qui avait trente-deux ans lorsqu'elle leur donna le jour. — Les médecins ne sont point encore parvenus à établir

An 1874 handbill printed in French. Bernth Lindfors collection.

as Clemens put it. During their long career the twins worked with most of P. T. Barnum's famous nineteenth-century human oddities. One season they toured out west as far as Missouri with the original Siamese Twins, Chang and Eng Bunker. They performed with General Tom Thumb and his tiny wife Lavinia. Giantess Anna Swan was a close friend. The twins served as her bridesmaid at Anna's fancy 1871 London wedding.

Queen Victoria received the giant couple and Millie-Christine at Buckingham Palace, and supplied the bride's splendid gown and ring for the happy occasion.

No wonder nephew Fred McKoy said, years later, "I often wish I could live the life she lived!" Smith and Millie-Christine churned up and down the Mississippi and Missouri



Rivers during the glory days of the great steamboats. When they came home between tours, Mrs. Smith saw to Millie-Christine's education. The twins were bright as brass buttons, as everyone noticed. Mary Smith ignored Southern laws and taught them to read and write. She polished their social graces, and developed their musical talents.

At performances, visitors chatted with the twins, listened while Chrissie played guitar and the sisters harmonized on popular songs like *O'er the Waves We Float*, and *Sweet Spirit Hear My Prayer*. Millie's voice was a full contralto, Christine's a high soprano. "They walked about with a pleasing undulating motion," noted a Philadelphia paper, sometimes using the two outside legs, sometimes all four. And they danced the polka, the mazurka and the waltz!

"They walk sideways," a visitor said, "sing very well and [are] beautiful dancers, exactly suited for it and can dance and swing around more gracefully than anything you ever seen. Out dance anybody."

Mr. Smith died during the Civil War, leaving seven young Smith children and an estate which included thirty-two slaves ranging in appraised value from six hundred dollars to seventeen hundred dollars, plus Millie-Christine the double-headed girl, worth twenty-five thousand dollars. Fascinating fact: Twenty years later the twins demanded and received a twenty-five-thousand-dollar salary when they joined the Great Inter-Ocean Circus for a couple of seasons.

When the Civil War finally ended, Millie-Christine was ready for peace and freedom. They'd always shown an independent streak. Back when they were only four and newly arrived in Liverpool a reporter noted they were "already showing a consciousness of freedom." If anyone called them "niggers," he wrote, they would stoutly answer no, they were "coloured individuals." It would have been Millie who asserted it most vig-



The Carolina Twins as they appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* on July 14, 1866. Author's collection.

orously. Always slightly smaller than Chrissie, and less robust, she was the spunky one. The one on the left side in pictures.

With the South a shambles, the Smiths and the McKoys found themselves in straitened circumstances. The twins were fourteen. Plucky Millie and good-natured Chrissie decided it was up to them to provide for both families. "The only alternative was for us to again go upon exhibition," they say. "None can mistake our determination in remaining under the guardianship of Mrs. Smith. Our object is two-fold: We can trust her," they underline that, "and what is more, we feel grateful to her and regard her with true filial affection. We will not go with any one else."

For the first time, Millie-Christine would draw her own share of the profits. Her parents, Monemia and Jacob McKoy, would travel with the show. Mary Smith and her oldest son, Pearson, would learn how to route the tours, and attend to ticket sales.

Pearson, twenty now, was ready to follow in his father's footsteps as business manager. The little party headed North, all of them except the twins as green as Mr. Smith had been when first he hit the show-business trail.

Millie-Christine insisted on one big change. From now on, with very rare exceptions, there would be no more gynecological examinations by curious physicians in every town. Since babyhood, she'd been prodded, probed, and peered at by male doctors, eager to see for themselves how her most private parts merged together.

At one of their first post-war bookings, a Washington, D. C. doctor visited the show and came away complaining. "The keeper, Mr. Smith, would not allow me to see them naked," he said,

"nor place my hand under their clothes to examine the pelvis."

Most people loved the show. "The girls are bright and intelligent," said an 1866 New York *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*.

"They sing, play, dance, read and write and converse, and do it all with sprightliness and good humor." They could also play on two pianos and jump rope.

"They seem perfectly cheerful," said *Leslie's*, "and declare they know of no inconvenience and protest they would be unhappy if they were separated, were such a thing possible."

In today's world where such a thing *is* possible, they would be good candidates for successful separation, judging from their medical reports.

Billed variously as The Two-Headed Girl, The Two-Headed Lady, The Two-Headed Nightingale, Millie-Christine cross-crossed the United States. In their twenties they made a Grand Tour of Europe which lasted for seven years and carried them as far as St. Petersburg, Russia.

In 1874 Parisian doctors were as miffed as American doctors had been by Millie-Christine's flat refusal to let them examine her "more hidden







# CIRCUS WINTER QUARTERS OF THE PAST

## BARNETT AND WALLACE BROS. YORK, SOUTH CAROLINA

During the 1930s and 1940s Barnett Bros. and Wallace Bros. truck circuses were well known in the eastern part of the United States. They were the same circus owned by Ray W. Rogers. Although thought by many to have been a Canadian, Rogers was actually born in Newport, Vermont in 1888. Rogers' family moved to New Glasgow, Nova Scotia around 1900. It was there that began his career as a circus owner.

His first circus was called Rogers Exposition Shows and went out in 1925. By 1928 the show had grown and became Barnett Bros. It was advertised as "Canada's own amusement institution." The winter quarters were in New Glasgow, where new cages and trailers were constructed. *Billboard* reports at the time said the show traveled on twenty-nine trucks. Some of the new units provided sleeping compartments for the show personnel. The circus used an 80 foot round top with

one 40 and two 30s.

In 1929 Rogers first took his circus to the United States. The season ended in Easley, South Carolina and went into a winter quarters in York, South Carolina. The show continued to winter in that city from that time on.

During the early 1930s Barnett Bros. paraded each day. Many of the trucks were well decorated, including a number of cages. In 1934 Harry Carey, a well known movie cowboy, was featured.

In 1937 the title was changed to Wallace Bros. Hoot Gibson, another movie cowboy, was featured. The big top had grown to a 125 foot round with three 40s. and there were six elephants.

In 1938 the title was changed back to Barnett and movie cowboy William Desmond was featured. The Barnett title was again used in 1939. The circus featured Lee Powell of Lone Ranger fame.

In 1940 it was again Wallace Bros.

with Powell continuing as the feature. That title would remain for the following years the circus toured. On June 6, 1940 the equipment was leased to George Hamid and Bob Morton. The trucks were re-lettered as Hamid-Morton Circus featuring Clyde Beatty. The Hamid-Morton tour last until August 10, playing mostly Shrine sponsored two and three day stands.

Following the 1941 season Rogers advertised Wallace Bros., for sale with or without the show-owned winter quarters property. He had no takers and the circus went out again in 1942.

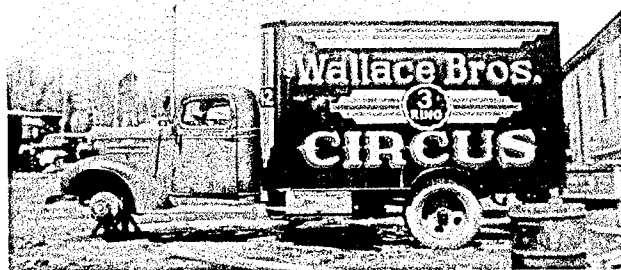
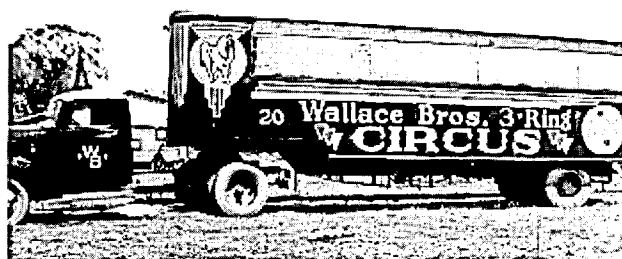
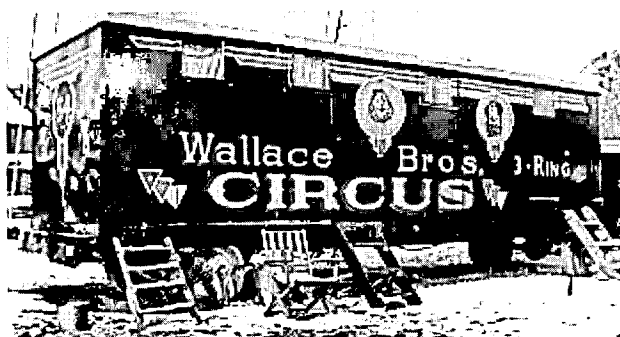
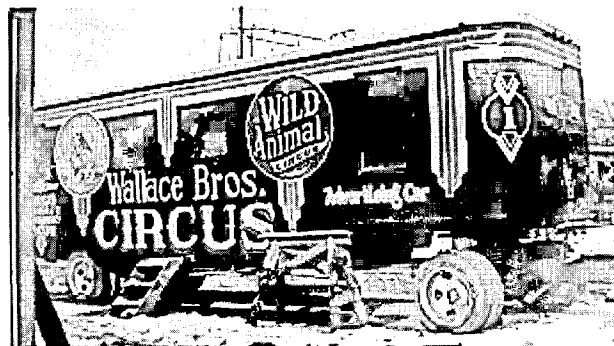
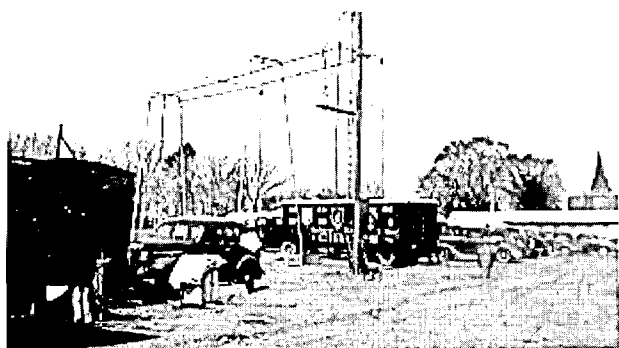
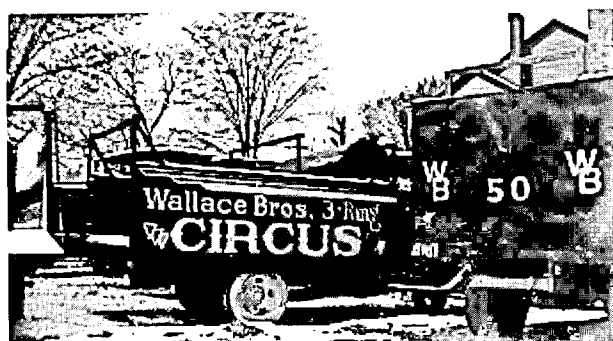
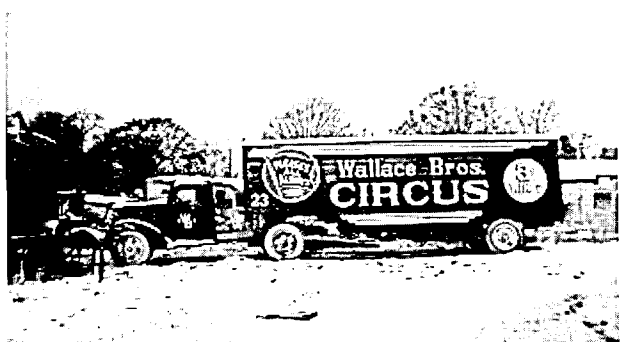
In 1943 Clyde Beatty joined with Rogers to operate the Clyde Beatty-Wallace Bros. Circus, traveling on fifty trucks.

In 1944 Beatty left and combined his equipment with Russell Bros. Rogers took his circus out for its final tour. The equipment was then sold to Clyde Beatty.

Rogers died on April 13, 1946.









# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING

## THE BIGGEST CONSOLIDATION OF MANAGERIAL BRAINS EVER ENLISTED IN A SINGLE ENTERPRISE

Vol. V, Chapter 4, Part 1

By Orin Copple King

1897

On Saturday, October 16, The Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. America's Greatest Shows Consolidated began its 1897 tour of Kansas at Paola. It was an abbreviated tour, comprised of only five towns. October 16, Paola; 18, St. Joseph [Missouri]; 19, Atchison; 20, Topeka; 21, Ottowa; 22, Burlington; 23, Venita [Indian Territory].

Charles Stow, press agent, planted the following story in the Paola *Times* of October 7: "America's Largest Shows United.

"Colossal Consolidation of the Great Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Menageries, Circuses and Hippodromes.

"In the co-partnership perfected last year between J. A. Bailey and the Sells Brothers, and to which the former contributed the great and noted Adam Forepaugh Show and the latter the enormous united shows which have made their name a household word on the American Continent and in the Antipodes, the millennium and apotheosis of the most popular entertainment seems to have been reached. In place of the lion and lamb lying down together and being led by a little child, two big herds of performing elephants, tremendous hippopotamuses, trained sea-lions and seals, and all the other savage and exceedingly rare wild beasts and birds belonging to the two finest and most complete menageries in the world, are harmoniously grouped, aggregated, performed and led through a captivated country, by unquestionably the biggest consolidation of managerial brains ever enlisted in a single enterprise and backed by capital practically unlimited. The announced names of the male and female hippodromic

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equestrian, aerobatic, eccentric, comic and special talent indicates that the racing, circus, aerial and amusing features of this formidable federation surpass all preceding showing, while the double street parade will be a colossal and entrancing wonder in its way. The most strangely sensational novelty announced is the appearance of two remarkable aerialists (sic), who, while riding an inverted bicycle, in an inverted posture, upon an inverted track, perform incredible feats with nothing apparent to prevent them and their bike from being dashed headlong to pieces.

"As the purpose of this unity is to exhibit a great deal more than heretofore, without advancing prices, it is one combine which the public will heartily approve of. Moreover, the effect will be to prevent the invasions of inferior shows and to protect the community from gross imposition and swindling devices.

A crowded midway of Forepaugh-Sells in 1897. Pfening Archives.



"The consolidation of America's greatest shows will exhibit in Paola on SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16th, 1897."

An attractive 4-column ad also ran on the 7th and again on October 14. Featured was a cut showing "The Initial Performances of the Illustrious Oxfords in Unrivalled Double Jockey and Principal Bareback Specialties." Another cut showed the cavernous mouths of two hippos.

The ad boasted of "The World's Three Greatest Herds of Elephants in the Greatest Performance Ever Taught."

The show presented nothing that was less than the greatest. "THE GREATEST AMPHITHEATRE EVER MOVED.

"THE GREATEST RACES EVER RUN.

"The Greatest Male and Female Charioteers.

"The Greatest Jockeys and Thoroughbreds.

"The Greatest Speeding Wild Beasts.

"The Greatest Successes of All Tracks."

The ad ended with the announcement of the "TWO GREATEST PARADES!"



On another page, the *Times* ran a handout describing the parade: "A SPLENDID FREE SHOW"

"The United Street Parades of the Great Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers Shows.

"The two performances of the above named enormous consolidated shows at Paola on October 16th, 1897 will be preceded by a morning parade of unprecedented magnitude and attractiveness, which it will cost nothing to see, and which no one with an eye for spectacular splendors, pompous displays and holiday sensations should miss. The single parade of either of the big shows represented has heretofore been classed as a wonder of wealth and magnitude in its way, and now that the two are consolidated, and many new, striking and elegant features added, the result must be an overwhelming arenic highway demonstration. The three grandest herds of elephants, Cleopatra's gorgeous barge of state, a whole menagerie of rare wild beasts in open and performing dens, many led animals from distant climes, a hundred ornate and pictured chariots, cages, Mother Goose golden illustrations and Arabian Nights equipages; hundreds of the most beautiful horses, ponies and armored and Orientally appareled (sic) participants, are among the brilliant sights which will richly reward the sight-seeking pilgrims. And low excursion rates will afford all a cheap opportunity to take them all in, as well as America's Greatest Shows Consolidated.

E. W. Mitchler, a North Side merchant, announced a circus sale including free tickets. "Commencing the week of the Circus, October 11, we give FREE a ticket to every man, woman or boy who buys for cash a \$7.50 suit or a coat or better also to every woman or boy buying a \$2 knee pants suit or overcoat we will give a free boys ticket. Come early in the week to make your selection to avoid crowd. See the Circus FREE besides getting the best goods for the least money, quality considered."

Following show day, the Paola *Times* made no mention of Forepaugh-Sells.

The South in 1897 suffered a severe plague of yellow fever, which



Back cover of a 1897 Forepaugh-Sells courier. Pfening Archives.

restricted all circus activity. The *Times* reported on October 14: "YELLOW FEVER SITUATION BUSINESS IN TEXAS AT A STAND-STILL. SERIOUS BLOCKADE IS ON"

"Austin, Texas, October 13.-The most serious situation now confronting the people of Texas is the almost complete blockading of travel, owing to the yellow fever scare. Many trains on all the principal lines have been abandoned, and local lines have stopped running entirely. Both divisions of the Houston & Texas Central and the Southern Pacific are tied up most effectually, not a single wheel moving, save in the extreme northern portion of the state. Every small town in the state is rapidly organizing shotgun quarantines, so trains cannot stop except at the big cities. The situation in the entire state is highly panicky, and the feeling is one of growing alarm and apprehension. By tonight, unless the situation is soon relieved, the entire southern and central portion of the state will be practically without any railroad facilities, as all trains will be stopped."

In spite of yellow fever and limited rail movement, Forepaugh-Sells

played 33 dates in Texas, beginning with Denison on October 26 and ending at Longview on December 2. The show closed at Texarkana, Arkansas, on December 3.

Atchison enjoyed the circus on October 19. The *Daily Champion* on October 8, had a report on Charles Stow, "one of the best known newspaper men in the country, formerly of the Buffalo Express and later of the Chicago Herald, is in town today as a representative of the great menagerie and circus to be in Atchison, October 19. Mr. Stow was a classmate of Grover Cleveland, and is one of the most delightful talkers and versatile writers in the country. He was for many years the press agent for the P. T. Barnum shows, and there are not many men more popular with newspaper publishers. Mr. Stow assures the *CHAMPION* that the Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers combined shows to be in Atchison, October 19, is the best and most elevating entertainment on the road. It is amusement—excellent, clean and genuine. As this is the first great show to visit Atchison this year, we agree with Mr. Stow that it will not only draw an immense crowd, but it will please all who come."

The day after the Atchison date, the *Champion* published the following review: "After the Show.

"There were several notable things about the Forepaugh-Sells show yesterday. One was the absence of gambling and fakir fellows usually around a show. The second fact that impressed one was the appearance of the showmen. That flashy dressed, rather hard faced, individual was missing; while the concert ticket sellers and other rustlers were clean, good appearing young men. The horses were well fed, the wild animals showed careful treatment. There were forty-three cages in the menagerie, and some things were never seen in Atchison before, besides the fourteen elephants, drove of camels, herd of ostriches, cattle, etc. Any child who was kept away from the show missed the largest and best natural history lesson possible to attend.

"Everybody was pleased with the show from the inspiring grand entree



to the thrilling chariot race at the close. The pair of hippopotami were marched around the ring, giving a good view of one of the most curious and rare of the animal kingdom. The performance was loudly applauded last night. The living picture introduction started the enthusiasm and the exhibition of Messrs. Garneil, Lozell and Ryan on the loft bars held the vast concourse of people spellbound. Their exhibition was

new, as was, in fact, nearly all of the performance. The actors are nearly all Europeans and presented innovations to the American ring. Even the clowns were new. They did not repeat the old ringmaster dialogue jokes, but worked on new and more amusing lines. There were seven bareback riders who omitted all the old tricks, but gave a new and more skillful exhibition of equestrian art.

"The most wonderful feature to many was the acts of the sea lions and seals who played on musical instruments, twirled burning torches and did other remarkable things. To others the favorite act was that of the trained elephants or the performance of the sagacious ponies. This show was free from vulgarity of every kind and was given without any waits or delay and with from three to eight attractions going on at one time so that people could find something to watch at all times that might suit their fancy."

The Atchison *Daily Globe* reported that, "The only complaint heard about the combined Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers' shows which exhibited in Atchison yesterday,



A Forepaugh-Sells lithograph used in 1897. Circus World Museum collection.

was that there was too much to see. Having only two eyes, no person could see it all, but the general verdict is that it had what it advertised, and was the biggest tent exhibition Atchison has ever witnessed. The show is clean, and the herd of clowns were funny without being vulgar. The trapeze work is worthy of the high sounding name of mid-air triumphs. The horses were handsome

Woodward's sea lions were a feature of the 1897 performance. Circus World Museum collection.



and numerous, and several bare back riders leaped from the ground to a standing position on running horses, an act considered wonderful a few years ago. Still, the most remarkable performance of the show was the exhibit by the school of educated seals and sea lions. Their understanding of what is expected of them, and their compliance with the demands of their

master, is not far removed from human intelligence. After seeing the trained seals, we believe that fish could be educated. The herds of trained elephants actually appeared, and they were actually trained. The uniformed ushers were actually in existence. The Forepaugh-Sells show is what it is claimed to be."

The *Globe*, in other columns, claimed, "The merchants are in favor of a circus every day. At least twenty-five per cent of the women on the streets yesterday bought shoes at Barkow's." The *Globe* also informed its readers that, "The Forepaugh-Sells circus came into Atchison yesterday in three sections and went out on the Santa Fe this morning in five sections. The reason is that it is down grade from St. Joe to Atchison, and up grade from Atchison to Topeka."

As the circus prepared to leave St. Joseph for Atchison, an accident occurred, which a headline in the Atchison *Daily Champion* called a "Dangerous, Exciting Time."

"A St. Joe reporter has at last got hold of the



truth regarding the wreck of the circus train as it was about to start for Atchison Tuesday morning. He says: "The circus men say the accident was due entirely to the carelessness and negligence of the switchman who was sent to protect the train after it was set out on the main line.

"The rear car which had on it 'Cleopatra's barge,' the hippopotamus cage, a cage of lions and a lunch wagon, was broken so that it had to be left behind. The trucks were demolished and the long beams snapped in two. The 'Cleopatra' was thrown high in the air and fell to the side of the track, being badly crushed.

"The hippopotamus cage was thrown off its truck and but for the immense weight of the two hippopotami, the cage would have turned over. The two animals became very much excited, the showmen say, and the keepers rushed to their cages and cowed them into submission. The lion cage was broken and at first it was feared the animals would escape, but the lions crouched in fear. It was fortunate that they did not get out, as they are especially savage, and considerable trouble has been had before when accidents have happened to their cage. A cage in which panthers are kept was thrown off its 'chairs' and the animals pitched about savagely. The 'chairs' are blocks which hold the wheels on the cars.

"The cowcatcher of the locomotive was smashed and the front truck damaged, the engine telescoped into the rear car, the rear trucks of the car being on top of the engine.

"On the next to the rear car, the tiger cage was thrown off its 'chairs' and the kingbolt broken. The tigers were too frightened by the crash to stir. The third section had in it fifteen cars. Most of these cars had on them wild animal cages. Almost every wagon on this section was damaged by the collision. The sea lion cage was on the front of the section and the force of the collision at the rear was so great that the running gear of the cage was broken off.

"When the wreck occurred, the switchman, who had been in the saloon too long, ran to the place

# BURLINGTON, FRIDAY . . . . . OCT. 22

## GREAT STORES of EXCLUSIVE FEATURES

### GREAT PROGRAMS of GREAT FEATS.

### GREATEST Menageries.

### GREATEST Circuses.

### GREATEST Hippodromes.

A GREATER RETURN FOR THE MONEY THAN ANY ONE WOULD EVER DREAM OF ACHIEVING.



Numbered, coupons, tickets reserved, seats, in town on day of show.

**NOW SEE THE BIG 4-PAW AND SELLS BROTHERS SHOWS**

A Huge Arctic Menagerie. The Most Aggregative. Supremely Attractive. Incredibly Amazing. Prodigious Perfect.

Two 1000 Best Wonders. 2 Enormous Menageries. 2 Stupendous Circuses. 2 Colossal Hippodromes. 2 Titanic Tree Paradises.

Triumph of Instruction. Perfection of Amusement. Home of Healthful Fun. Metropolis of Nature. Mighty Moral Magnet.

Great Rings, 2 Stages. 100 Acts and Performers. Hundreds of Champions. Daring Lady Acrobats. The New Woman Clowns.

Permanent Demonstration. Of The Only Holiday Gleanings.

2 Big Bands of Elephants. 100 Cages and Charlotte. Most Terrific Rages. Most Amazing Feats. Most Superb Displays.

Always and Everywhere Promoted. Recently as Advertised:

2 Great Daily Exhibitions. 2 and 3 P. M. Ours Early. Admission Only 50c. Children Under 9 years, 25c. Seating Capacity 15,000. Free Will Contribution.

This newspaper ad appeared in the Burlington Daily News on October 8, 1897. Kansas State Historical Society collection.

where the engine and car had telescoped and began swearing and blaming the circus employees. A fight ensued in which the switchman was severely beaten by the circus hands. It took all night to clear up the wreckage.

"Ephraim Sells said, yesterday: 'It was all due to drunken carelessness. The switchman was drunk and he left the train there without any signals. Then the engine came down the track forty miles an hour and threw us in the ditch.'

"William Chambers, superintendent of the menagerie, said: 'They were ready to start and the men had gone to bed. Patsy Forepaugh and I have staterooms in the elephant car and we had gone to bed. We were up quite a way in the yards and a switch engine had come up for us. When we got down there, Patty says to me,

"Star, we're in the ditch." (Mr. Chambers is known in the circus as 'Star Kid.') When we got there we found the engine under the last car and the cages all jammed up and Cleopatra's wagon was tipped over. The hippopotamus cage was down on the ground and all that saved it from tipping over was the weight of the hippopotami. They weigh 3,400 each. The switchman came down there drunk and got kind of sarcastic and some of the boys beat him up. The engineer told me that he was running eight miles an hour, but he must have been going faster than that. The hippopotami were wild and they had their mouths wide open and were grunting. They could easily have broken out of the cage. The lion cage was badly broken, and they might have gotten out if they had tried. It would have been, "Kitty, lock the door" if they had. If it had happened ten minutes later, Patsy and I would have been killed, for our elephant car was to have been fastened at the end of the train. The passenger coaches are attached back of us and if they had been on, several people would have been killed. All the wagons on that section were damaged."

The Daily Champion also noted that, "Charles Madden of Leavenworth attended the Sells-Forepaugh circus in Atchison. Madden was a clown for Sells Bros. for twelve years. He had not seen any of the brothers, however, in the past fifteen years."

Whatever the Sells brothers did, no matter where it occurred, was always of great interest to the people of Topeka. The brothers wintered their early shows in the city and as they prospered Allen, Lewis and Peter invested thousands of dollars in the development of the city. When Allen sold out to his brothers, he settled in Topeka, where he spent the rest of his life. Allen, his wife, and his adopted son Willie, are buried in Topeka Cemetery.

Topeka was billed for October 20.

When an elephant rampaged in Providence, Rhode Island, the July 3 Topeka State Journal, carried the story: "ELEPHANT ON A TEAR.

"Dick' Takes Possession of a tent in a circus in Providence.



"Providence, Rhode Island, July 3—There were lively times in the menagerie tent of the combined Forepaugh-Sells Brothers circus at Reservoir avenue yesterday. Dick, an elephant known to the circus as 'bad' held possession of the tent for about two hours. A keeper, while directing the driving of stakes, approached too near the elephant, who was



fastened to one of the other elephants in the herd. Dick lunged at him, but couldn't catch him. He tried a second time with no more success. A moment later the chain broke, and the elephant was loose. He charged after the men in the tent, who ran out or hid behind cages, and Dick held possession of the place. The employees finally rallied and chains were thrown over the elephant and he was secured."

A sad story from Yonkers, New York, appeared in the *Journal* on July 17.

#### "10-HORSE TEAM BOLTS.

"Forepaugh & Sells Brothers' Big Golden Chariot in a Runaway.

"New York, July 17.—At 1 a. m. yesterday the ten horse team, which draws the big golden chariot in the Forepaugh & Sells Brothers show, was coming down Palisade avenue in Yonkers on its way to the yards of the Hudson River road, where the circus train had been side-tracked. The street is a winding one, and the grade heavy, but with his feet braced against the strong brake and the ribbons gathered between his thumbs and fingers, Driver Stout was master of the situation.

"Two blocks above Getty square, the brake-rod broke with a snap. The ponderous truck weighing tons, rolled down on the heels of the pole horses and set them plunging. Stout tried to rein them in, but he might as well have tried to stop a tornado by pulling on the reins.

"As the wagon gathered headway it swept the horses down before it.

"They could not stand the pressure. They reared and plunged and then began to run.

The beautifully painted Angel tableau appeared in the 1897 Forepaugh-Sells parade. Pfening Archives.

"The driver guided them around the turn at Getty square and then down the steeper hill of Main Street, which ends at the river far below. As the wagon gathered headway the noise of the steel-shod wheels grew louder, the rattle of 40 hoofs upon the pavement awoke strange and fearful echoes and the deep bass of Stout's voice striving to subdue the horses rolled out in the still night air.

"He saw certain death before him; death for the horses and for himself and destruction for the wagon and its valuable load. There was only one thing to be done. He did it.

"With a deft gathering of the reins he threw the leaders. Those behind them stumbled and fell over them, the next pair followed suit, and soon the whole team, like so many tenpins, had been bowled over, and were rearing and struggling in a horrible heap, with the wagon on top of them.

"The driver had been pitched off on his head and lay unconscious in the street. He was not much hurt, but the horses were so badly injured that some of them may have to be shot.

"The truck and its contents weighed 10 tons. If it had continued to the bottom of the hill it would have collided with several electric cars stationed there and done terrible damage."

An advance story for the Topeka exhibition was published October 5: ONE MORE CIRCUS: "Yellow fever in the south will be responsible for Topeka securing another show this

year. Sells Brothers circus has been compelled to cancel all its southern dates on account of the epidemic of fever, and in returning to winter quarters will pass through Topeka and give an exhibition here on October 20. At the regular council meeting last night Mr. W. W. Phillips, agent for the Sells Brothers, made application for a license for the circus to show on that

date.

"Mr. Phillips not only asked that a license be granted, but he also requested that the regular fee charged big shows be cut in two for the Sells Brothers. As reasons for the latter request he stated that the Sells Brothers pay taxes annually in this city amounting to \$3,400, and that because of the yellow fever in the south they had this year been compelled to cancel their southern dates at great loss and expense.

"The council voted to grant the Sells Brothers the license at the terms asked. The regular fee for a big show is \$150 for the show proper, and \$10 for the sideshow. The Sells will pay but \$80."

Forepaugh-Sells arrived in Topeka at 5 o'clock on show day and spread their tents in the Douthett tract in the southwest corner of town.

According to the *Topeka Daily Capital*, "The afternoon attendance proved a cold frost for the management, and it proceeded to reciprocate by curtailing the performances."

"The entire show is an immense affair," the *Capital* continued. "Last night there was a larger attendance at the circus than in the afternoon. But there was plenty of room last night. No one who had the price was kept out for lack of room.

"Nothing was the matter with the show. It was lively from start to finish. The funny parts were funny, the thrilling parts were thrilling and the wonderful parts were wonderful."

Day and date with Forepaugh-Sells in Topeka was a traveling theatrical company performing a circus play. "The Night at the Circus" was also played at Hiawatha.



The *Capital* noted that: "Al and John Ringling attended the circus yesterday. Their show was at Lyons, but the brothers came over, as Al said, 'Just to see the show.'"

After the evening performance, according to the *Capital*, "Two of the best performers in the Forepaugh-Sells Brothers circus, left the show at Topeka on Wednesday and yesterday they left Topeka for Europe.

"They were William Orford and his wife and were bareback riders. These two people were among the best performers with the circus and are two of the cleverest performers there are in their line of business. Mr. and Mrs. Orford owned the horses, which they rode in the circus. They were the big white ones.

"They go from Topeka to London, where they will join the Barnum & Bailey circus, which is touring Europe. They shipped their horses from Topeka and left, themselves, yesterday afternoon. They will sail from New York in November."

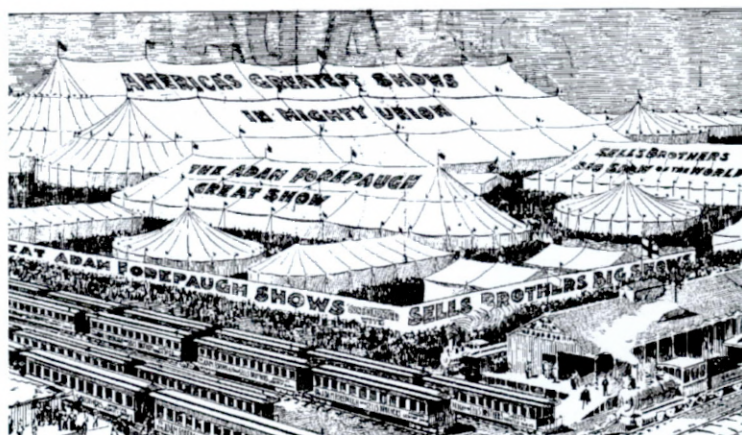
The *Journal* had a few short remarks after the show had come and gone: "The courthouse was deserted yesterday afternoon for the circus.

"Sousy's band' last evening at the circus played 'A Hot Time' during the triumphal entry.

"Bunton Clay is a boy 11 years old who ran away from his home in Lawrence to see the circus. The Topeka police arrested him, and his father, who is a stonemason, came here for him.

"A Topeka man and his wife watched the circus unload, went to the afternoon and evening performances, then followed the wagons to the train and watched the loading of the cars—and they had a good time.

"The Forepaugh-Sells circus played to small audiences. The afternoon was a great disappointment as regarded the attendance, and the evening attendance was little better. It was a big show and pleased the people.



Adam Forepaugh and Sells. Bros. Circus as pictured in the 1897 *Courier*. Pfening Archives.

The *Journal* continued to report on the circus and on December 27 published the following: "MISS HIPPO IS DEAD

"Columbus, Ohio, December 27. Miss Hippo, aged 25, died today from unknown causes at Sells Bros.' circus winter headquarters.

"She had been with the circus for 17 years, and, as the average life of a hippopotamus is 25 years, she had lived her allotted days.

"Her purchase price was \$5,000, but she can now be replaced for \$2,000."

The campaign for the exhibitions at Ottawa on October 21, began in the *Daily Republican* on October 1: "HEADING FOR OTTAWA.

"The elephant will range in Kansas this fall. The circuses of the country are headed this way. Already has Ottawa been visited by two, and another is billed for tomorrow, while the agents of Sells-Forepaugh and the Ringlings are in the city arranging for grounds and dates.

"Two causes conspire to create this ripple in the amusement world. The big shows usually play late fall and early winter stands in the south, and elaborate routes are laid out covering as much time as possible (for your circus manager had rather play for expenses only than tie up in winter quarters).

"But there is a counter attraction, or rather distraction, occupying the boards in the sunny south land just now—yellow Jack has flung his tawny banners upon the outer walls, and a cordon of shot-guns is around

his en-campment. The Yankee is warned off.

"So there has been a radical and hasty rearranging of routes on the part of the 'gigantic aggregations of the marvelous wonders of Cosmos,' and what so certain as that they have all cast longing eyes on the wheat bulged granaries of Kansas and are striding (sic) to get here

first!

"The Sells-Forepaugh show will be here about the 21st of this present month, and Ringling a little later."

The *Ottawa Evening Herald* reported on October 2, that, "Sells-Forepaugh's shows will surely be here on October 21. They have fifty-five cars. Their advance agent, Sam Joseph, has been here for two days making arrangements. He got out a dodger yesterday telling the people to wait for the only big show on the road. It probably was the cause of Lemon Bros. reducing their price to 25 cents."

In its issue for October 21, the *Herald* said: "There were five sections to the Forepaugh & Sells Bros.' circus train. It arrived at about 5 o'clock this morning. The elephants had a train all their own and a baggage car attached for their trunks."

Once free of editorial cuteness, the *Herald* continued, "They gave an excellent parade at 11 o'clock. It consisted of more than 100 wagons, nearly 200 head of horses, fourteen elephants, three bands, a steam calliope and various other attractions. The parade was a good one; perhaps better than what they gave last year while here."

"About 5,000 people came to this city yesterday," the *Herald* claimed, "to see the show or parade or both, and not an arrest was made nor was there an occasion for one."

Speaking of the performers, the *Herald* stated that, "The circus part of the show was simply indescribable."

The *Daily Republican* related the sad tale of the school children. The schools had been informed that the parade would pass at 12:00 and the



children were promised early dismissal to see it. Unfortunately, the parade appeared at eleven o'clock.

The *Republican* praised the performance: "A GREAT SHOW.

"The Sells Bros-Forepaugh consolidated shows yesterday more than met public expectation, for they carried out their advertised promises which is the exception with circuses. It is impossible, in a limited newspaper article, to call attention to all the super excellent features of the great show—the program is simply stupendous (sic) in numbers as well as splendid in character. The grand entree is alone worth the price of admission, and it is immediately followed by the revolving pedestal of art that is an innovation startling in beauty and novelty. The introduction of a pair of giant hippopotamuses in the ring is a valuable feature, that completes the opening display.

"A commingled scientific and ludicrous mid-air aerial-bar performance by Garnell, Lozell and Ryan is an entertaining feature. Other displays that a conscientious writer can not pass by are the high school and park riding by W. H. Gorman; the Ben Achmet troupe in posturing feats; the Farris wheel trapeze, by Omy sisters; A. M. Davenport's bare-back trick acts; the wonderful juggling on the horse-back by Wm Orford; phenomenal picipale (sic) bare-back riding by Wm Walleth, and the work of the dancing Forepaugh elephants, under Mr. P. Forepaugh. At the same time Mr. Frank J. Melville is performing with a cute combination of elephants, ponies and Burmese cattle. The renowned Silke family performs marvels on bicycles, and all through the merry hours is strung a vein of inimitable fun through the efforts of a corps of clowns. Captain Woodward's school of trained sea-lions and seals arouses utmost astonishment at the almost human intelligence displayed.

"The great racing events Jockey, clown-and-poney (sic), ladies flat, Roman-standing, grey hound, chariot racing events, were given exactly as advertised."

The Forepaugh-Sells press department went all the way to Paris for the handout appearing in

the *Burlington Daily News*. The story ran in a column adjacent to the show's ad, giving the Burlington date as Friday, October 22. "THE CIRCUS AND THEATER.

"Cardinal Richard Favors the Former. But Not the Latter.

"The special cable from Europe to the *New York Sun*, stating that Cardinal Richard, Archbishop of Paris, has laid the hand of discipline upon his clergy, by forbidding them, under pain of suspension, to attend the theater, even at a matinee, but endorsing 'the circus' as 'the theater of childhood, where the priest goes as the guide of children,' has caused much comment in amusement circles. The general press agent of the great Forepaugh and Sells Bros. consolidated shows says: 'As the circus and theater are radically different and not rivals for public favor, there is no bias in the assertion, the truth

This newspaper ad was used by Forepaugh-Sells in 1897. Pfening Archives.

of which is patent to all intelligent observers, that Cardinal Richard's edict is based upon the fact that while the circus has improved in moral tone, the theater has so deteriorated that much of the language and many of the situations and exposures tolerated on the stage would be hissed from the arena. The managers of the greater circuses realize that the majority of people prefer entertainments to which they can safely take their children, and as the little ones are the mainstay of the circus, special effort is made to harmlessly amuse them, by the liberal introduction of spectacles pleasing to their unsophisticated eyes, and of funny and cute clown and animal performances, just suited to their comprehension. The result is that irrepressible Young America clamors for the circus and gets there, accompanied by thousands of grown-up children, never seen at theatrical performances."

The *News* also reported: "Circus Day.

"The big circus has come and gone. The show was all that was advertised and more, and it left Burlington in a feeling of contentment. As far as known it was a strictly legitimate aggregation, and carried no skin games to pay expenses. The crowd in town was the largest seen here since the Republican rallies of 1896 and the attendance at the afternoon performance of the show is estimated at 10,000. The managers of the show were well pleased with the turnout here, and said it was a better crowd than they had at Topeka and other metropolitan towns. The show spent lots of money here with us, and also brought the crowd to town to trade with our merchants. The tradespeople all report a good business yesterday. The farmers have money this year and are spending it. There is no reason why we should not welcome a good circus like Sells Brothers and Forepaugh here. Everybody is pleased with their treatment by the show people."

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video Inc., Topeka, Kansas.

(Season of 1897.)

# SCRANTON, MAY 29.

EXHIBITION GROUNDS NEAR BASE BALL GROUNDS.

"It helps into alliance the three biggest show enterprises in the world."—New York Press.



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A SHOW THAT REPRESENTS THE NATION'S GROWTH  
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Inexplicably Mysterious and Marvelous Performances, Just as pictured, with Naughts Apparent to Detail. 8 inch. Incomprehensible Wizard Feats and Vigils.

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THE ONLY

### Trained Sea Lions and Seals

### 3 GREATEST HERDS OF ELEPHANTS

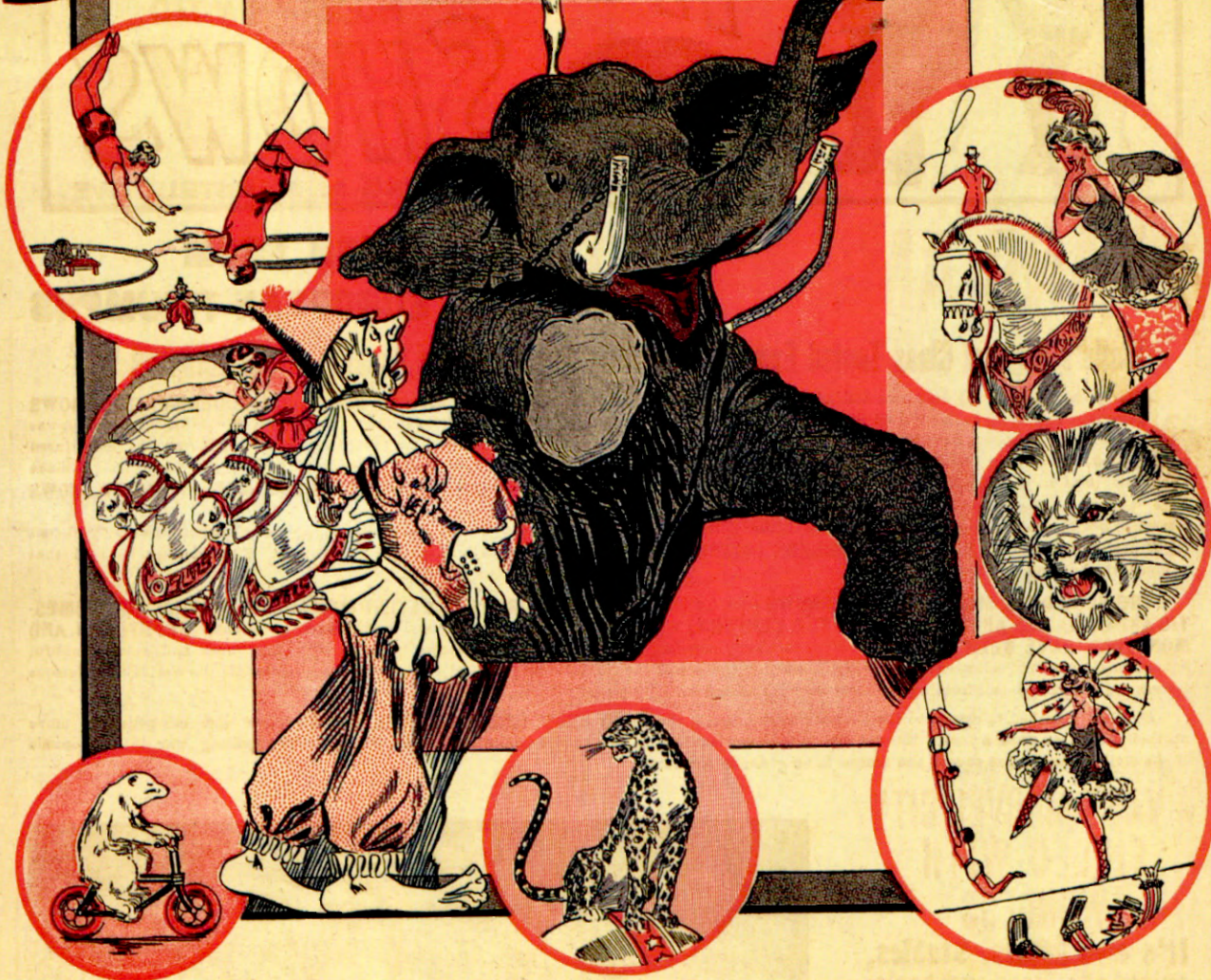
And the Most Intelligent, Best Taught on Earth.

### 104 CHARIOT DENS, AQUARIUMS AND CARS

THE WHOLE WORLD'S ARENIC CHAMPIONS, 100 ACTS, 4 RINGS, 2 STAGES, MID-AIR TRIUMPHS, GRAND REVOLVING PEDESTAL OF ART.



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1915